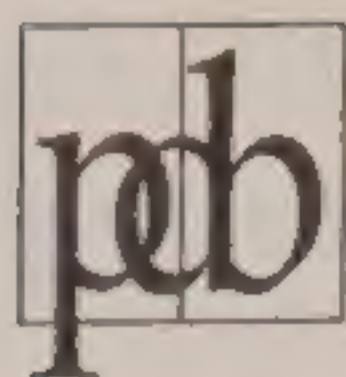

BIRDS ♦ PEACE ♦ WEALTH

ARISTOPHANES'
CRITIQUE OF THE GODS

Three Plays Translated by
WAYNE AMBLER
and THOMAS L. PANGLE



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BIRDS ♦ PEACE ♦ WEALTH

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INTRODUCTION

DIVINE COMEDY

Aristophanes' Critique of Zeus

ARISTOPHANES HAS ALWAYS been understood to have set the standard for what great comedy can be. His genius was established most obviously by his creation of wonderfully engaging, madcap plots, by his deployment of wildly hilarious, original metaphors, by his witty coinages of bizarre new words, and by his wickedly apt nicknames for famous people. No doubt, Aristophanes also shows little inhibition against using humor of the raunchiest variety. Scholars rightly stress that his plays are also highly political, taking up such serious issues for the Athenian democracy as the ongoing Peloponnesian War, the dubious power of demagogic leaders such as Cleon, and the harmful effects of new and radical intellectual forces such as Socrates, the sophists, and Euripides. Animating the present volume, however, is a concern with a deeper dimension than all these: we are convinced that the comedies of Aristophanes were written also as explorations of fundamental and enduring questions of civic and human existence. We take as genuine the poet's repeated proclamation that he is the educator of his audience, and thereby the educator of the city or society, in the most important matters—justice and piety—and that, as such, he is superior by far in wisdom to Socrates and all that the latter stands for and embodies as philosopher and natural scientist and educator of only a tiny elite.

Although our approach will distinguish this volume from those which focus on Aristophanes' humor, literary gifts, or analyses of Athenian political problems, we are not blazing an entirely new trail. Philosophers of the stature of Hegel and Nietzsche expressed deep admiration for Aristophanes' wisdom, even if his most obvious talent was his capacity for producing laughter. Hegel observes that "it cer-

tainly goes against our German seriousness” to admire a vulgar jokester; but Hegel then uses this observation to turn against the kind of seriousness exhibited by his fellow countrymen. As he goes on to say, “this poet . . . was thus no ordinary joker and shallow wag who mocked what is highest and best, and sacrificed all to wit with a view to making the Athenians laugh. For everything has to him a much deeper basis, and in all his jokes there lies a depth of seriousness.”¹

But in what does Aristophanes’ “depth” consist? Where is the “seriousness” to be detected in such a mocker? It is instructive to start from Hegel’s focus on the *Clouds* for its forceful presentation of the dangers represented by Socrates’ aggressive effort to settle all questions by his dialectic. While “Reason” may seem to be a benign or even noble principle, to be encouraged in all college classes and promoted almost as a discipline unto itself under the heading “Critical Thinking,” it can show also a darker side, and the arch-reasoner Hegel finds this illuminated by Aristophanes’ presentation of Socratic dialectic:

The exaggeration which may be ascribed to Aristophanes is that he drove this dialectic to its bitter end; but it cannot be said that injustice is done to Socrates by this representation. Indeed, we must admire the depth of Aristophanes in having recognized the dialectic side in Socrates as being a negative; and—though after his own way—in having presented it so forcibly.²

Hegel sees in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* the disclosure that Socratic reasoning teaches “the nullity of the laws” and that “the payment of debts can be disregarded.” More generally, “the power of judging in Socrates’ method is always placed in the subject,” so “where this is bad, the story of Strepsiades must repeat itself.” Aristophanes’ riotous comedy provokes Hegel to reflect on the dangerous consequences of promoting Socratic dialectic as a way of testing authorities and hence as an untested authority itself. Hegel here identifies a profound issue which strikes at the heart of biases still strong today. As he does so, he also pays tribute to the power of comedy to reveal through exaggeration, and thus to teach.

1. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 1.426–30. [*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Michelet, in *Werke*, ed. Marheineke et al. (Berlin: 1833), 14.85–89.]

2. Ibid.

Nietzsche differs radically from Hegel in his final assessment of Socrates, but he too treats Aristophanes as an admired guide to the fundamental issues.³ Nietzsche sees Aristophanes as sharing and elucidating Nietzsche's own view that "the syllogistic whip" of Socratic dialectic represented a mortal threat to the noble culture of the Greeks: "The unerring instinct of Aristophanes was surely right when it included Socrates himself, the tragedy of Euripides, and the music of the New Dithyrambic Poets in the same feeling of hatred, recognizing in all three phenomena the signs of a degenerate culture."⁴ Nietzsche not only honors Aristophanes for having anticipated elements of his own critique of Socrates, he also ranks Aristophanes as a great creator, along with Caesar, Homer, Leonardo, and Goethe (*The Will to Power*, 380). To be sure, Nietzsche's critique of Socrates does not rely solely or even mainly on Aristophanes. It is Plato's much more flattering or beautiful portrait of Socrates that Nietzsche makes the basis of an argument close to the one made by Hegel on the basis of Aristophanes: Nietzsche contends that even in the Platonic portrait of Socrates, Socratic dialectic reveals itself as corrosive, not only of the authority of law, but also of life-giving musical art, and especially tragedy: "Optimistic dialectic drives *music* out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms; that is, it destroys the essence of tragedy" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, section 14, p. 92). And in a passage that could easily be based on the experience of Aristophanes' Strepsiades and his son in the *Clouds*, Nietzsche submits that this "optimistic dialectic" is based on a hope that is ultimately disappointed:

Anyone who has ever experienced the pleasure of Socratic insight and felt how, spreading in ever-widening circles, it seeks to embrace the whole world of appearances, will never again find any stimulus toward existence more violent than the craving to complete this conquest and to weave the net impenetrably tight. . . . But now science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. (Ibid., section 15, p. 97)

3. Leo Strauss introduces his classic interpretative study of Aristophanes (*Socrates and Aristophanes* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966]) by stressing how Aristophanes' presentation of "the problem of Socrates" foreshadows Nietzsche's; Strauss notes that Nietzsche "uses Aristophanes' critique of the young Socrates as if it had been meant as a critique of the Platonic Socrates" (6–8).

4. *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 17, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 107. And consider also that Nietzsche commends Aristophanes' "profound instinct" in presenting Socrates as "the first and supreme *Sophist*, as the mirror and epitome of all sophistical tendencies" (section 13, pp. 86–7).

In Nietzsche's eyes, then, Socrates is a boaster: he promotes his dialectic optimistically, as if it were able to resolve fundamental questions conclusively, but his dialectic proves much more able to corrode the existing tradition than to erect a new one of comparable nobility.

What Hegel and Nietzsche say about the Aristophanean critique of Socratic critical thinking provides major clues to what Aristophanes holds to be the distinctive virtues of comedy as a vehicle for promoting and conveying wisdom. Aristophanes does not tire of asserting his vocation as a teacher of his audience, and a teacher in the most important matters—justice, war and peace, piety or religion, love, the nature of wisdom. His attack on Socrates as a teacher has as its reverse side Aristophanes' claim to be, himself—in and through his comedies—the truest teacher of the Athenians. What is the basis of this claim? His comedy, Aristophanes contends, teaches above all insofar as it provokes thought, and thoughtful questioning, and critical and self-critical reflection. What makes comedy such an excellent promoter of *critical* thinking? Comedy characteristically debunks or deflates, and its targets can include what is authoritative or powerful and therefore usually dangerous to criticize—even impermissible to criticize. Comedy can provoke and enable the audience to think critically about what are otherwise uncriticizable institutions, leaders, customs, and beliefs. Comedy can get away with this because comedy is by definition not “serious,” but only playful; comedy and its critique is thus much more easily brushed off or excused than is explicitly “serious” critique.

The comic poet is permitted to be outrageous in public because it is presumed he does what he does only or largely for the sake of laughter. Nothing is serious for him, so—somewhat like the Fool in *Lear*—he wins the right to speak more freely than others. He need not portray the Athenian wartime leaders as knowing what they are doing; he can even present the almighty Athenian people themselves as if they are a bit dim-witted and susceptible to flattery (as he does in the *Knights*). Similarly, he can suggest that Zeus is not worthy of the beautiful temples and solemn ceremonies men devote to him. He can even represent on stage the possibility that the gods have abandoned men to their destruction (as occurs in the *Peace*). The comic poet can put such thoughts on center stage even at a religious festival. Wise comedy can provoke “safe” critical thinking—criticism of authorities that leaves the authorities intact even while, often by wildly exaggerated caricature, it reveals underlying absurdities and limitations of conventional wisdom. This applies espe-

cially to the theme central to the plays included here: the relationship between gods and men. Because Aristophanes as comedian need not defer to the "official" or conventional views of his audience, he is able to provoke thought about the gods' possible responsibility for the deep imperfections of human life, about the ability of adroit human beings to defeat or destroy the gods, and about the relationship between piety and important social conventions.

No doubt tragedy can also challenge conventions. Indeed, Aristophanes criticizes Euripides for doing so too boldly. When characters representing radical ideas appear on the tragic stage, however, they fail. Threats to justice, the established laws, and the gods pervade tragedy; but these threats are more often than not defeated, through dramas that allow or force their protagonists to finally recognize their "tragic flaws." In the three comedies included here, however, it is the most radical and unconventional characters who triumph: rather than seeing tragic flaws punished, we see comic virtue rewarded, even though this virtue entails radical impiety.⁵ Because it appears to be a mere joke, however, the outcome gives no offense.

Not the least of the spurs to taking Aristophanes as a profound thinker and teacher is found in Plato. Aristophanes is assigned an impressive role in Plato's *Symposium*, and this notwithstanding such responsibility as Plato may assign to Aristophanes' *Clouds* for the trial and execution of his teacher (*Apology of Socrates* 18c8–d2, 18b4–c1). The *Symposium* is devoted to speeches that at once praise and analyze love, understood both as a human phenomenon and as a god. Why do we love what we love? Do we really love what is good? Or, is it what we regard as belonging to or akin to us that we most truly love? Is our loving likely to lead us to happiness? These are fundamental questions we continue to ask and that exact a toll if we answer them poorly. Plato has Aristophanes invent a myth as a way of presenting his answer to such questions; and although this myth is riotously funny, it is also so memorably evocative that it has never ceased to be the object of fascinated study. The myth is, in short, entirely worthy of being included in Plato's philosophic treatment of love. By having Socrates single out Aristophanes' myth in his ensuing speech, Plato makes it even clearer that Aristophanes' hilarious con-

5. Consider the case of Euripides' lost play *Bellerophon*, which Aristophanes parodies in his *Peace*. Like Trygaeus, Bellerophon has a bone to pick with the gods and attempts to confront them by riding the winged steed Pegasus to heaven. He is cast back down to earth, however, as a cautionary tale to other mortals.

tribution embodies in comic dress a profound effort to understand love and related issues.⁶

Plato further honors Aristophanes by making him one of the two intrepid companions who spend the wee hours of that night drinking and talking with Socrates—although by the morning it turns out to be only Socrates who never passed out and who appears sober, hangover-free, and ready for the challenging conversations of the next day (223c2–d12). We think it is fair to say that apart from Socrates himself, only a very few characters in the thirty-plus Platonic dialogues are treated with such respect as Aristophanes. It would seem that in Plato's view, at least, there is no reason to assume that an author of comedy cannot also be a profound thinker, a point which may be suggested also by Socrates' concluding thesis of the *Symposium*—that it belongs to the same author to know how to compose both comedy and tragedy (223d2–5).

A tradition has it that Plato also wrote, "Seeking to acquire a temple which would never fall, the Graces found the soul of Aristophanes." Whether true or not, this accords with the presentation of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, a presentation that recommends that we approach this comic poet as someone worthy of Socrates' company and of Plato's respect. Two other legends have been passed down which express the sense that Plato held Aristophanes in great esteem. One reports that Plato sent the plays of Aristophanes to Dion of Syracuse as the best way of coming to understand the character of the Athenians; another has it that on Plato's death, a copy of Aristophanes was found under his pillow.⁷

Plato is not only our guide as to how we would study Aristophanes, he also helps to introduce the unifying theme that has led us to bring these three particular plays together into a single volume. That theme is the critique of Zeus and the Olympian gods. To explain the origin and cause of love, Plato's Aristophanes invents the myth that human beings were once spheroids with four arms and four legs but who mostly rolled their way to and fro; to humble this then-uppity species, Zeus

6. In his reported dialogue with Diotima, Socrates presents her as having considered the view animating Aristophanes' speech, that love is directed toward what is "one's own," what belongs to oneself (*Symposium* 205d10–206a5; cf. 212c4–6). It is true and important that Diotima does not accept this view and opposes to it the view that love or *erōs* is of what is good, whether it belongs to oneself or not. We do not claim that Socrates or Plato agrees with Aristophanes—to the contrary!—only that they take him seriously as a thinker and hence encourage us to do the same.

7. On the latter, see Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 28, where he takes this as sufficiently apt as to be a fact.

cut them right down the middle, as one might do by applying a taut wire to a hard-boiled egg (*Symposium* 189d–190e). Each half then longed to be reunited with its other half, and this longing is what we know as love. Funny as it is in such minor respects as in the image of these rolling spheroids with their eight appendages, the myth is also partly tragic, for it shows the splitting to be permanent and (at best) only intermittently and imperfectly subject to love's remedy. Our never-to-be-fully-satisfied longing for restored wholeness exists in large measure because of a cruel, clumsy, and utterly un-philanthropic action by the king of the gods, who with an amusing but brutal lack of imagination threatened to halve the halves if they did not conform their actions to his wishes. Based on Plato's presentation of Aristophanes' understanding of love, at least, the comic poet is critical of Zeus, and hence begins to indicate why "Aristophanes' Critique of the Gods" is the subtitle for this volume.

Zeus and the Gods in Aristophanes' Plays: An Overview

A survey of Aristophanes' eleven surviving comedies shows that while the gods are regularly invoked in pious oaths and prayers, it is nevertheless the case that the gods' characters and powers are not infrequently called into question by the mortals on stage.⁸ This is not to say that the existence of the gods is denied—except by Socrates and his ilk. Indeed, in as many as six of the comedies, one divine being or another actually appears onstage.⁹ In four of these, the *Frogs* and the three plays included here, the gods featured onstage are central to the plot. Each of our three plays is distinguished by featuring a mortal hero who directly challenges the legitimacy of the rule of Zeus, and does so on plausible and coherent grounds. Aristophanes does not leave it at having his protagonists utter despairing laments about the defects of the prevailing divine dispensation; his heroes act vigorously to correct the misrule of the king of the gods, by substituting the worship of divinities whose superiority is powerfully manifest in terms all human beings can understand. The Aristophanean heroes certainly do not think that Zeus deserves obedience by the

8. An especially amusing example is Nicias's proof that the gods must exist since they so clearly hate him (*Knights* 31–34).

9. Hermes makes a brief but important appearance at the end of the *Clouds*, as does a certain Amphytheus in the *Acharnians*. Although the chorus of *Clouds* admits that the Athenians do not yet recognize them as goddesses (578), they lay claim to being divine, and what is more, they seek to join, and thereby to transform, the pantheon of gods lawfully worshipped by the Athenians.

mere fact that he is the divine king; they do not live in patient forbearance of the ills of the world; and, in contrast to Dostoevsky's Ivan, for example, they do not threaten, in despair or anger, to "return their ticket" to live in such a misbegotten world. Rather, when they find Zeus to be guilty of misrule, they go on the attack, with radical religious innovation. Amazingly, each revolution is spectacularly successful, and Zeus's rule is either overturned or severely curtailed by a determined mortal's root-and-branch religious reform.

Through these comedies Aristophanes provokes, in the minds of at least the strongest in his audience, the thought that determined, shrewd or wise mortals might be able to transform the prevailing religion, to reshape the rule believed to be exercised over mankind by divinity. And as one recognizes and reflects on the fact that Aristophanes indicates a deep spiritual kinship (though not an identity) between himself and these heroes of his, one begins to discern that the comic projects of Aristophanes' heroes are wildly exaggerated, but thereby deeply revealing, reflections of the poet's own much more subtle educational project for the citizenry. The success of this educational project—varying widely in its impact on various portions of the audience, but going even beyond the accomplishment of Euripides¹⁰—provides the compelling empirical evidence for the correctness of the comic poet's answer to the question, "What is a god?" This success vindicates the comic poet's claim to unrivalled wisdom in regard to the most important of all matters.

Thus the three comic heroes in the plays included here raise the questions of whether there are gods, who they might be, how powerful they are, and how they might be changed or eliminated. Although the precise form of such questions changes from age to age, these are questions that are inseparable from political life; and they certainly are powerfully present in our own day. We have already mentioned Nietzsche in this regard, but let us add that the great theorists and architects of the modern liberal state designed its contours partly with an eye on the goal of diminishing the role of religion in the public square. Not unlike our three comic heroes, they wanted to reduce dependence on "Zeus" and his priests. In his place, and like our three heroes, they sought peace, wealth, and human rulers liberated from exaggerated piety. And nowadays the so-called New Atheists are pressing the case that it is high time for a final defeat and elimination of the powers of darkness that, in their view, have cost us so much blood and treasure. As

10. See the *Thesmophoriazusae*.

their most eloquent exponent puts it over and over again, "Religion poisons everything."¹¹ Aristophanes was not a modern liberal; still less would he agree with the New Atheists' advocacy of universal public atheism. He does, however, put dissatisfaction with the gods at the center of the three plays included here, does bestow victories on the human critics of those gods, and does invite us to think with him about the justice of their causes, the tactics behind their victories, and the limits of their successes. We can best begin doing so if we contrast our heroes' successes with Socrates' failure.

Aristophanes vs. Socrates on Zeus and the Gods

Once we see that our three plays are united in that each represents a successful assault on supreme divinity, it becomes evident that they stand together also as an instructive contrast to the disastrously unsuccessful impiety of Aristophanes' Socrates—whose hubris is defeated and punished at the end of the *Clouds*. Why, we are prompted to wonder, is Socrates punished for his kind of impiety, whereas our three protagonists become triumphant heroes for theirs? The clues are evidently to be found in the differences between the two kinds of impiety, and between the two kinds of impious protagonists. Socrates' attack on Zeus consists in bluntly affirming, and teaching, the nonexistence of Zeus, and of all traditional divinities—rather than seeking to replace Zeus's and the other traditional divinities' rule over and within society with a rule of better providential deities. And the threat to Socrates from his boldly open denial of the existence of caring, providential gods becomes manifest as the dramatic contest between father and son reaches its climax (*Clouds* 1464–77). The suicidal danger incurred by the arrant impiety of Socrates and his circle is underscored by what are almost the last words of the play: "Chase them! Strike them! Stone them! Do this for many reasons, but especially because they were knowingly unjust to the gods." The god Hermes even appears onstage to support the violent actions taken against the godless Socrates and his students. When we consider, in contrast, the three plays included in this volume, we are led to see that in the poet's eyes Socrates' mistake is in the *way* he rebels against Zeus, *not* in his disposition to do so. A closer synoptic and comparative look at these four plays will lend strength to this interpretation and thereby

11. Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2007).

shed light on Aristophanes' understanding of the gods and how to defeat or even "destroy" them (*Birds* 186, 1514).

In contrast to the heroes of our three plays, the Socrates of the *Clouds* is presented as dwelling in Athens without serious complaints about his own or the city's condition. He is content with his little school or "thinkery"; and although he suffers various comic setbacks, he endures them with equanimity while remaining enjoyably absorbed by his scientific investigations and teaching. We learn that while Socrates happily ponders and instructs, Athens is at war: it is the extreme hardship of this war that drives Trygaeus, at the outset of the *Peace*, to wonder whether Zeus is aware of the high human toll the war is taking; but in contrast to Trygaeus, Socrates is unmoved by the war-induced sufferings of his fellow Greeks.¹² We also learn that Socrates is dirt poor—but again, whereas the hardship of living in poverty, and sympathy for his fellow impoverished farmers, drives Chremylos, the hero of the *Wealth*, first to Delphi and then to attempt to restore sight to the god Wealth, poverty as a personal or social ill does not trouble Socrates. Last but not least, Socrates lives in the midst of a citizenry notorious for pursuing endless lawsuits and constantly levying fines: it is such incessant litigiousness that drives Peisethetairos, the hero of the *Birds*, to abandon Athens and fuels or justifies his attack on Zeus; but Socrates, although he is a master at teaching tricky courtroom rhetoric, pursues his private life without litigious passions. Seeming to need little or nothing from either the Athenians or the Olympian gods, Socrates is not impelled to plot escape from or revolution against the powers that be.

Accordingly, the action of the *Clouds* is initiated not by Socrates, who has no great troubles or needs, but by Strepsiades—who, like the three heroes of our plays, and the Greeks in general—is driven to desperation by lawsuits, poverty, and war. Most acutely, Strepsiades is drowning in debts arising from the equestrian enthusiasms of a son whose expensive tastes outstrip his family's resources, rendered precarious by the consequences of war. At his wits' end, Strepsiades turns in desperation to Socrates' little thinkery, where he hopes to learn how to win any case in court, be it just or unjust, and thus to escape financial ruin by defrauding his creditors. Socrates, the man least in need of victories in court, appears most able and willing to teach others how to achieve such victories and thus exploit their fellow

12. Unless noted otherwise, "Socrates" will always mean the Socrates presented by Aristophanes, not necessarily the Socrates of whom we read in Plato and Xenophon. With regard to the limited or nonexistent effect of the war on Socrates, however, see also Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates* 18.

citizens. In his encounter with Strepsiades, Socrates in no way discourages the old father from his unlawful enterprise; rather, he assures him of complete success, if only he will learn what Socrates has to teach.¹³

Immediately on meeting Strepsiades, Socrates takes the theological offensive: he belittles the old man's religious belief and offers to teach him the truth about the gods (*Clouds* 247–54). The teaching begins with assertions and proofs that Zeus does not even exist, and that his purported functions as maker of rain, thunder, and lightning are carried out by the Clouds (364–94), while his function of punishing perjurers is simply not performed at all (395–411). The would-be pupil initially resists these strange new teachings (366–411), but is soon won over, and proclaims in his own name that Zeus does not exist (822–28). Perhaps surprisingly, Socrates suffers no immediate ill consequences for having directed such openly impious teachings to a rather ridiculous old visitor to his school. That Socrates is not promptly hauled into the courts of a city where not believing in the gods of the city could be punished by death may be explained in part by Strepsiades' failure to understand fully his teacher's meaning: when Strepsiades hears Socrates insisting that instead of Zeus, Necessity or Vortex is supreme, Strepsiades understands Socrates' words in light of Greek myths about the dethroning of one god by another (of Ouranos by Chronos, and of Chronos by Zeus—374–81). By supposing that there is now a new divine king, Strepsiades is protected against the true Socratic teaching that there never has been any divine king whatsoever, and never will be, thus leaving all things under the sway of mere necessity (395–407). In other words, Strepsiades learns to parrot Socrates' scientific views, without grasping their full theological radicalism.

After Socrates has judged Strepsiades to be too old and stupid to learn his lessons, the father's hopes turn to persuading his son Pheidippides to take his place as a student of Socrates. Even though the youth has nothing but contempt for Socrates and his associates, and appears to be unconcerned with the toll his expensive habits are taking on his father, Strepsiades manages to persuade him to go to Socrates' thinkery; perhaps Strepsiades learned something from Socrates about persuasion after all. As the first stage in the education of the youth, Socrates stages a debate between the personified cases for living justly and living unjustly—a debate in

13. Socrates shows a similar indifference to the unlawful consequences of his education even after he succeeds in teaching Strepsiades' more competent son (1148–53).

which the case for injustice wins decisively. The drama of this event makes it seem an especially imprudent exercise for Socrates to carry out in a city in which one may be executed for corrupting the youth; yet because Pheidippides remains unimpressed, even this crushing defeat of the Just Argument entails no immediate threat to Socrates.

The decisive turn toward Socrates' downfall occurs during his offstage education of Pheidippides. Although the poet prudently and responsibly keeps this education offstage, its powerful effects are made evident by the way it transforms Pheidippides—to his father's horror. Prior to his private encounter with Socrates, Pheidippides was absorbed by the excitement of horse racing and eager to spend his days among like-minded enthusiasts, and he actively resisted going to Socrates' school (102–04, 119–20). When he returns home from Socrates' thinkery, he is a changed man—and completely enthusiastic about his new self. As he puts it:

How sweet it is to spend my time on novel and clever matters,
And to be able to look down with contempt on the established laws.
For back when I used to apply my mind only to horsemanship,
I couldn't even say three phrases before I made a mistake.
But now, since he himself has made me stop all this,
And I associate with subtle opinions and arguments and thoughts,
I think that I will teach that it is just to beat my father. (1399–1405)

Other evidence of Pheidippides' decisive transformation at Socrates' hands includes his confidence that Zeus does not exist (1469–71), his new preference for the morally shocking Euripides over the more traditional poets Aeschylus and Simonides (1354–75), his trust in his teacher Socrates as the decisive authority on questions he cannot answer (1430–32, cf. 1467), and his view that it is perfectly just for a son to beat not only his father but his mother as well (1440–46, 1321ff.).

It is no surprise that when Strepsiades gets a close look at the effect on his son of Socrates' "liberating" education, the enthusiasm the father once had for that education turns to revulsion: Strepsiades wanted his son to learn how to pull off only a little injustice, enough to escape a few debts; what he gets is the overthrow of everything he holds dear. Zeus, the king of the gods, proves to be tied to concerns of far deeper importance to Strepsiades than his debts: not least, his son's filial respect or affection for mother as well as father. After his son shows just how far he has traveled down the path blazed by Socrates, Strepsiades finally sees that Socratic sci-

ence leads to the renunciation of even the most fundamental laws undergirding the family. No wonder the father races back to his former religious beliefs and seeks to punish those he holds responsible for having corrupted his son. Since the old man can see that it is highly unlikely that he could out-argue Socrates, the clever teacher of courtroom rhetoric, and get the philosopher punished by a court proceeding, Strepsiades has no recourse except to attack Socrates with violence. But first, of course, Strepsiades reaffirms the existence of the king of the gods (1470–85).

Strepsiades never considers that Zeus himself will punish Socrates for his impiety, perhaps in part because Strepsiades has come to hold himself responsible for what has gone wrong (1452–64); but neither did Strepsiades expect earlier that he himself would be punished by Zeus for seeking to learn how to get away with perjury in the courts. Strepsiades, we may say, manages to believe in Zeus as a defender of the moral order while yet believing that Zeus is in need of human assistance to do his job. Strepsiades becomes Zeus's required ally and vindicator, and burns Socrates' school to the ground as the curtain falls.

Whereas Plato's Socrates goes willingly to his death while leaving behind the beautiful and powerful message that the unexamined life is not worth living, the Socrates of Aristophanes' *Clouds* is chased off stage as his thinkery is burned down, leaving behind the much less beautiful but still powerful message that the examined life comes with no guarantees of a salutary outcome, and even, or perhaps especially, under Socrates' tutelage, may prove corrosive of our dearest attachments.

Zeus and the Gods in Birds, Peace, and Wealth

Having examined Socrates' failure, let us now consider the success of the three heroes of the plays in this volume—and first of all, the triumph of the hero of the *Birds*, the most radical of our three heroes. Peisthetairos does not deny the existence of Zeus, but instead wins over the birds as his allies and then leads them in a successful revolt against Zeus and the other Olympians.¹⁴ In the course of consolidating his grip on his allies, Peisthetairos does not shrink from grilling some of them for dinner, while simultaneously outwitting three divine plenipotentiaries so as to secure for himself Zeus's beautiful companion, Basileia. She comes

14. For an extended discussion of Peisthetairos's rise to power over the birds, see Wayne Ambler, "On Tyranny in Aristophanes' *Birds*," *Review of Politics* 74:2 (2012) 185–206.

complete with the full supply of Zeus's powers, including his feared thunderbolt, and Peisthetairos cruises to victory with only a brief and ineffective moment of divine resistance to his daring revolution (1189–1261). Those in the audience who are sympathizers with the traditional gods, and who must have rejoiced at Socrates' downfall, wait in vain to see Peisthetairos struck down as Socrates was. Aristophanes could easily have made fun of Peisthetairos as he did of Socrates, thus sending a message to any others who might have been tempted to take lightly the power of the gods. But instead of depicting Peisthetairos's impious revolution as a failure, Aristophanes ends his play with the triumph of this shocking character: the very last line of the play even celebrates the apotheosis of Peisthetairos as "the highest of the divinities."¹⁵ The same author who ended the *Clouds* by burning down the school of a teacher whose radical thoughts on Zeus and justice caused distress in but a single Athenian family now allows the hero of the *Birds* not only to criticize Zeus but to defy and even replace him. What does Aristophanes teach by depicting such successful impiety on so grand a scale?

While the *Birds* is the most radical of the three plays in which Zeus is successfully defied, it does not diverge in spirit from the *Peace* and *Wealth*. In the *Peace*, the protagonist is deeply vexed that the war with Sparta has gone on so very long. Trygaeus evidently assumes that Zeus wants to be good to the Greeks, for he first concludes that Zeus must simply be unaware of the harm being done down on Earth (63). Trygaeus thus decides to ascend to heaven to inform Zeus of the dire situation down among the Greeks and to try to get the supreme deity to bring the war to an end. On just his second attempt Trygaeus enjoys an unlikely success, flying aloft on a giant beetle that feeds on and is voraciously attracted to dung. The creature, which has the power to conduct humans on an ascension to heaven and to the gods, does not imply a very flattering notion of the destination. Our hero calls attention to his own courage, for this is after all an especially dangerous way of going to heaven: if even a single outhouse door is left ajar, the beetle will veer sharply back to earth, throwing his rider to his likely death. On the other hand, Trygaeus

15. The *Birds* was originally performed soon after a convulsive incident in which religious statues all over Athens were mutilated and sacred mystery rites were reportedly mocked in secret blasphemous ceremonies. Prominent Athenians, including Alcibiades, were accused of being responsible and many were severely punished in a hysterical witch-hunt. See Thucydides 6.27–28, 6.53, and Andocides, *On the Mysteries*. Aristophanes' play shows no sign whatsoever of endorsing the religious reaction: all to the contrary—Peisthetairos is, in Strauss's words, "that super-Alcibiades" (*Socrates and Aristophanes* 305).

is certain that he has no need of carrying food to sustain the dung-beetle once he gets to heaven. When Trygaeus and his mount arrive at the residence of the gods in heaven, Trygaeus learns that the Olympians became annoyed at having to watch and listen to the Greeks suffering in the war below, so they moved further away to escape the racket, and abandoned human beings to the rule of a single god, War, who has buried alive the goddess Peace and is preparing new tortures for men. Trygaeus learns, then, that Zeus's failure to help human beings is not merely the result of ignorance; Zeus is knowingly unleashing new woes upon the Greeks—even if he does so indirectly, through the agency of the fearsome god War.

Trygaeus is now faced with the choice of either submitting to this divinely-ordained outcome or turning against the king of the gods. Trygaeus is evidently convinced that Peace is deeply beneficial to humans, and on no good grounds forbidden to them. He unhesitatingly rebels and decides to try to excavate the goddess, even though this requires him to defy both War and Zeus, the latter of whom has threatened to execute anyone who makes such an attempt (371–72). Trygaeus digs up Peace with the help especially of peace-loving farmers; he then brings her back to earth in triumph, with her two attendants. While Zeus and the Olympian gods are not directly overthrown, they are utterly defied; and human beings now direct their worship and their prayers to Peace herself, who is called “the greatest of all the goddesses” and “the most benevolent of the gods,” while War, Zeus, and most other Olympians fade into insignificance (308, 584–602). Sacrifice is now offered to Peace, not to other gods, and the very nature of the sacrifice is altered: no fatted ox or big fat pig is offered up to Peace in lurid, gory ceremonies, but instead a peaceful animal, a little lamb, is sacrificed in modest fashion and out of view. Prayers are also offered to the Graces, the Seasons, Aphrodite, Yearning, and Hermes. Ares, the god of war, is explicitly excluded as a target for prayer (456), and the other Olympians are simply overlooked. Aristophanes teaches that when human beings are gripped by the importance of peace, gods of a more militant disposition may be driven from the scene, and if human beings can secure Peace (or peace) by their own efforts, the felt need for Zeus and kindred divinities may dwindle or even evaporate. The gods thrive only when human beings think they need them, and the pantheon can be radically transformed so as to suit newly perceived needs.

At the same time, however, none of the characters in the *Peace* shares Socrates' view that Zeus simply does not exist. Zeus is confronted, not denied; and he is replaced, not merely overthrown or thrust aside. How Peace will fare as a substi-

tute for Zeus over the long haul is a matter for serious questioning; for even in the moment of greatest enthusiasm, the Greeks are not all equally zealous in unearthing her or in honoring her (464–507). Still, Peace is surely a great source of hope to the war-weary; their defiance of Zeus in the name of Peace will be rewarded much more richly than by, say, the ascetic life of Socratic investigation. The Greeks have a clear and present reason to overthrow Zeus and to elevate a more beneficent deity; and they look forward to the joys that doing so will bring.

As Trygaeus triumphs over War and Zeus in order to bring much-longed-for Peace to the Greeks, so in the *Wealth* the lead character, Chremylos, triumphs over Poverty and Zeus in order to bring much-longed-for Wealth to the Athenians. The actions of Chremylos have their origin in a comic version of Glaucon's wonderful question to Socrates at the beginning of Book II of Plato's *Republic*. Chremylos asks whether he should perhaps be teaching his only son to be unjust rather than just. After all, he wants his son to be happy, but he has noticed that the just and god-fearing people like himself are poor, while the unjust have prospered; so should he not be teaching his son to change his ways and become an unjust rogue? Unlike Glaucon, Chremylos turns for guidance not to the philosopher Socrates but to the oracle at Delphi. As a consequence, he learns that the reason bad people are often wealthier than good ones is that Zeus long ago blinded the god Wealth, who is for that reason unable to recognize the deserving and distribute to them a larger share of his blessings. And why did Zeus do this? Out of envy for good men (87–92): what a charmer is Zeus! On learning this, Chremylos becomes determined to remedy this unjust situation by restoring the vision of the god Wealth; and he is not at all deterred by the knowledge that his plan is directly opposed to the will of Zeus—just as Trygaeus, the hero of the *Peace*, was undeterred by Zeus's threats. Amusingly, the god Wealth himself is completely intimidated by Zeus, so he is hesitant to seek to undo his divinely ordained blindness. The mortal Chremylos, however, is strengthened in his commitment to his project by the conviction that his conspiracy is a just and even a pious one. Just and pious people live miserable lives, so on their behalf he is in the right to defy Zeus, the source of their misery. Chremylos insists on this especially in a fierce debate with the hideous goddess Poverty, who tries both to threaten him and to explain how wonderfully good it is for human beings to be so poor (415–609).

Chremylos succeeds in restoring sight to the blind god Wealth and, consequently, in spreading wealth to all decent Athenians. This joyous result also has the amazing effect of putting to an end all prayer and sacrifice to the Olympian gods, for the

Athenians who have a sure route to wealth within their own power no longer turn to the Olympians for what has come to seem to all Athenians uncertain and unneeded assistance. Wealth seems able either to supplant or to provide for all other goods. Lest this dramatic decline of the gods be missed, Aristophanes has it reported by a discouraged and hungry priest of Zeus the Savior that the decline of devotion to the gods is so extreme that no one worships anymore in the temples—which are now used only as public latrines (1182–84).

Taken together, the *Peace* and the *Wealth* suggest that piety can be transformed if and when the prevailing gods can no longer be defended as good or just in ways intelligible and important to ordinary people. Put differently, our two rebellious human heroes possess—and what is more, evoke in the audience—what is at best a contingent devotion to supreme deity: their piety is derivative, not primary or fundamental; it is based on the premise that divinity must be beneficent in helping humans to secure such basic goods as peace and wealth. When Aristophanes' heroes put the existing gods to the test of this premise, and find the gods fail the test, the mortal heroes, as strong-souled men of action, are ready to lead the way in replacing the existing gods so as to achieve what is good, under better gods of human institution.

The *Birds* is not devoted to a single major perceived good for human beings, like peace or wealth, but is far broader in scope, and its planned solution is even more radical. Its protagonist leads a revolution directly against the Olympian gods, and his goal appears to be power—power which he promises to the birds but in fact achieves for himself (163). Peisthetairos defends his revolutionary efforts by showing what poor excuses for ruling gods the Olympians really are. They are ineffectual: Apollo is supposed to heal the sick, and Demeter is supposed to feed the hungry, but Peisthetairos mocks the thought that these divinities really perform these services (577–85). Truly great gods, worthy of human devotion, would gobble up the pests that damage the fruit we grow in our gardens; but so useful a service appears to be beyond the power of the Olympians! Yet their inaction does not keep the gods from expecting to be treated well by humans. They demand that mortals labor to build in the gods' honor, at great expense, beautiful temples with golden doors, where abundant sacrifices are offered to the gods. How much better would be birds as our gods! Birds eat caterpillars, and you can make the birds happy with a few handfuls of birdseed: you don't need a hecatomb of well-fatted oxen to sate the hunger of birds! As for a dwelling place, a little bush will please birds even more than an elaborate temple with a carved pediment and massive marble col-

umns (610–626); and of course one need not fear that birds are going to behave like Zeus and rape one's wives and daughters (554–60)! As the birds catch the spirit of Peisthetairos's impiety, they add, for their part, that Zeus seats himself solemnly in the clouds but deems himself to be too august even to lift a finger for those on earth who have pressing needs (726–28).

Although the heroes of the *Peace* and the *Wealth* successfully ignore Zeus's threats and reverse key policies, they do not attack him directly. Peisthetairos, however, takes the war directly to Zeus and the rest of the Olympians. His comic battle plan depends on, and vividly reveals, the weakness of the Olympians: he will have his avian allies wall off the air, which divides heaven and earth, thus keeping the savory sacrificial aromas from reaching and nourishing the gods. Thus cut off from the vapors below, the Olympian gods will be starved into submission or even destroyed (183–86). The poet grants him success; Zeus is destroyed (1514). Zeus not only fails to do anything good for human beings, he also is utterly incapable of defending himself once he is attacked by a resolute mortal. His response to Peisthetairos's assault is pathetic. He first sends Iris to investigate and soon thereafter sends three confused gods to negotiate. These gods quarrel among themselves and appear to bring only a very weak hand to the negotiating table; there is talk of Zeus wielding a thunderbolt, but we never get a glimpse of one. The divine plenipotentiaries do little but capitulate. In a different incident, soon after the birds sing an ode calling attention to their keen vision, Prometheus is able to escape Zeus's detection simply by opening a parasol (1506–09): Zeus lacks an eagle's eye. And in response to Peisthetairos's offer to help the gods punish humans who renege on their oaths to the gods, Poseidon is eager to secure this help—thus admitting that the gods are not effective enforcers of their own decrees.

The flimsiness of Zeus's purported strength is equally displayed in the *Wealth* and the *Peace*. In the former, even though Poverty makes a spirited defense of herself and threatens the rebels with destruction, Zeus never appears or otherwise supports his would-be defender. Indeed, Zeus is eventually starved into joining the man who defied him (1188–90). In the *Peace*, Zeus even appears to be unaware that Trygaeus has arrived in heaven and is violating his explicit orders that no one may excavate Peace. Trygaeus accomplishes this excavation with a mass of Greeks who are making a huge racket, but neither War nor Zeus has the slightest idea that this rebellious operation is taking place. Nor does the successful excavation of Peace elicit a response. Zeus's most decisive action in the entire play is to move further away from human beings, abandoning them to War.

All three of our plays present the gods as needy beings. Zeus may adopt the posture of august self-sufficiency, but he and his fellow-Olympians are very much dependent on human beings. This is comically represented by showing the gods to be in need of the nourishing vapors from the sacrifices offered up by men below. Hence, in the *Birds*, the gods are subject to being starved into submission by walls built in the sky to cut these vapors off. The Olympians are also in need of the sexual opportunities offered by mortal women, and hence are doubly frustrated by the walls. But behind this wildly absurd tactic of building a wall in the air to weaken the gods is an entirely serious suggestion: the Olympians may be destroyed if men stop believing in them and sacrificing to them. In fact, this is what happens to them in the *Birds*—the comic and unbelievable tactic of building a wall in the air to starve the gods is replaced by an absolutely believable and realistic tactic of persuading people to stop sacrificing to them (1515–20, 1236–37). The Olympians are truly destroyed not by anything physical, like walls, but because the Athenians cease to worship them (cf. 518–38). If the power of the Olympians comes only from men's belief in the Olympians, then ending these human beliefs results in the end of the gods' power. What lives by opinion dies by opinion.

Crucial to the success of our comic heroes' projects, and a point that must be stressed as revelatory of a major part of Aristophanes' understanding of human nature in its piety, is that the goods which men seek from the gods are mundane. The most striking evidence in this connection is that the gods Wealth and Peace are represented as largely satisfying mortals' needs for the gods, while in the *Birds*, Peisthetairos explains that what mankind wants in order to be satisfied is simply a longer, healthier, and more prosperous life (586–609). Not one of Aristophanes' characters looks to Zeus for the sake of eternal life or moral perfection. According to Aristophanes, what men look to gods to help them acquire are peace, wealth, health, long life, the cheerful countenance of kindly tranquility, well-watered plough-lands, baskets of eels, sweet dried figs, the joy of love, and the delights of the arts and festivity.¹⁶ Aristophanes does not use the gods, or anything else, to devalue the concerns or the pleasures of daily life. Aristophanes does not portray humans

16. *Peace* 999–1009, 1141–58, 1316–29; *Birds* 584–610, 704–36; *Wealth* 134, 500–16. The Graces, the Seasons, Aphrodite, Yearning, and Hermes, who assisted in the excavation of Peace, will presumably continue to have a place in the revised pantheon of the *Peace* (456), though it is striking that the Olympian Hermes does not appear after line 725, when Trygaios leaves heaven; nor is he even mentioned after this point, save in a single oath (963).

as in need of something beyond themselves to which they may express devotion and for which they may make genuine sacrifices. Thus Chremylos, for example, defends himself as just, but only as moderately, and thus sensibly, just. He seeks to be just so long as being just allows enjoyment of the blessings of prosperity; he is at least strongly inclined to abandon justice if it is not rewarded or accompanied by such blessings. The solution that Chremylos and the other Aristophanean protagonists seek is not Glaucon's—a heroic and transcendent kind of Justice whose value is so great as to be worth choosing even if it leads to the just man's being tortured on the rack and crucified. Aristophanes' characters turn to the gods for ordinary satisfactions and pleasures, and the gods who displace Zeus do so by appearing more likely to fulfill these needs and to help satisfy these pleasures. The new ruling gods do not demand that humans overcome their earthly and earthy needs and pleasures, and do not offer great rewards for such overcoming.

Yet it would be incomplete to say that for Aristophanes and his characters the gods represent nothing more than longed-for helpers and supporters of mankind's quest for basic satisfactions. Not all traditional divine beings fare as badly at Aristophanes' hands as Zeus does in the three plays in this volume. Even the same god may be viewed differently depending on circumstances and his different responsibilities. When imagined as a music-maker among the gods, for example, Apollo is celebrated in the *Birds*, not debunked; it is when he is considered as a healing god for human beings that he is treated scornfully for his failures (*Birds* 209–22, 772, 584). Along with Apollo in his association with music, the Muses and the Graces are elevated, not ridiculed (although unworthy poets are of course teased, even if they profess a connection with the Muses).¹⁷ If we look beyond Zeus and beyond the *Clouds* and the three plays translated here, Dionysius is the orthodox god who most draws our attention.¹⁸ The patron deity of the theater, his importance is confirmed—not without comedy, to be sure—in the *Frogs* by his service to both tragedy and to the city. Aristophanes' presentation of Dionysius, as well as the Graces and the Muses, returns us to this thought: the comic poet's consideration of the gods

17. For a few characteristic passages on the Muses or Graces, see *Birds* 659, 781–82, 1100, 1320; *Peace* 41, 456, 775, 816. For the teasing of a poet who relies too heavily on a claimed connection with the Muses, see *Birds* 905, 908, 913, 924, 937. In keeping with the comprehensive claims made on behalf of wealth (143–46, 160–64, 181–83), there are no references to the Muses or Graces in the *Wealth*—which is accordingly, as Strauss puts it, Aristophanes' "most humdrum" play.

18. Dionysius does not appear in the *Clouds*, but when Aristophanes is onstage as the lead Cloud, he refers to Dionysius as "the one who raised me" (519).

is not limited to what they do or do not do for us; it extends to how our thoughts about them affect and express what we do and how we live. While the most pressing question is the one raised in the *Clouds*—namely, whether piety is not a necessary source of supporting sanctions for duties and restraints essential to the family and the city—Aristophanes does not lose sight of the influence of imaginative thoughts about deities that inspire the human creation of beautiful music, poetry, temples, and statues (*Birds* 612–16, 1109–10; *Peace* 615–18). Aristophanes' plays do not constitute a blanket rejection or debunking of all personal deities; we must never forget that Aristophanes presents himself as one of the Clouds. Reflection on this and the kindred but contrasting apotheosis of the Titanic Peisthetairos may point to the implicit Aristophanean suggestion that human piety also expresses, in and by its more admirable and beautiful or charming gods, humanity's natural aspirations to the most spiritually rich enjoyments.

The Limits of Aristophanes' Critique of the Gods

If Aristophanes' criticism of Zeus and his rule or dispensation is far-reaching, it is not without limits. To repeat the most crucial point, not one of Aristophanes' heroic rebels goes so far as Socrates—simply denying the existence of Zeus or other gods.¹⁹ In each of our plays, minor or novel deities displace Zeus and the main Olympians; and these new, or newly promoted, divinities are heralded in the very titles of the plays in which they become supreme. The heroes of these plays call for a new and improved pantheon, not a mechanistic or godless universe. Aristophanes implies that the case against Zeus must be made in the name of new gods; even a boastful tyrant like Zeus would be hard to dislodge if the alternative were nothing. (And from a human point of view, Socrates' impersonal “god” vortex is no god at all.) In contrast to vortex, the birds, for example, are new and improved per-

19. Not only does Socrates deny the existence of Zeus, but he seems to deny all personal deities. His professed devotion to the Clouds gives way quickly to the claim that it is “vortex” (*dinos*) that “compels” the motions of the clouds, motions that Strepsiades had attributed to Zeus (367–80). Socrates' oaths to “breath, chaos [or ‘yawning void’], and air” do not make him a theist, nor even does an occasional oath to the god he explicitly denies (694) or to the Graces (773). Socrates' last reference to the Clouds in the play occurs less than one-third of the way in (423–24), and his student Pheidippides attacks Zeus in the name of vortex, not the Clouds (1470–71). It is not surprising that the Clouds, who invoke eight conventional deities in the parabasis and act to defend them, are ready to see Socrates punished by the end of the play (1458–61).

sonal divinities. They promise to do better than Zeus did in helping human beings find their way to abundant food, longer lives, amorous conquests, and a measure of wealth. The god Wealth promises to reward the just and make it unnecessary to choose between virtue and prosperity. And the goddess Peace promises to enable men to tend to their vines and enjoy the fruits of simple lives in the country. Great but solid hopes attend them all and sustain the forces arrayed against Zeus. Aristophanes' heroes are not anti-theistic; they seek new gods who come closer to living up to standards implicit in the human conception of and natural directedness to divinity.

Another, related—and crucial—limit on Aristophanes' critique of the gods comes to sight when we observe that the overthrow of the traditional gods is by no means accompanied by a revolution in or against traditional morality. To be sure, in the *Birds* at least, the birds promise precisely such a revolution. They announce to human beings that living as birds will eliminate the need to sacrifice pleasures in pursuit of noble action. Indeed, they say that all the shameful actions repressed by law will not merely be allowed but will even be noble, so there will be a complete transvaluation of values. Just as Socrates' ace student Pheidippides had outrageously defended the beating of fathers, so too do the birds (753–59). But contrary to the promise of these lines, and unlike Socrates, Peisthetairos is on the scene to act against this moral breakdown. He directly forbids what the birds had promised: in the new order, there will be no father-beating, and justice and moderation are imperative.²⁰ Peisthetairos leads a wildly radical revolution against the Olympians, yet he is careful to find a way to protect the moral and theological core on which his new city (and his own rule)—like any city and any civilized rule—will depend. Cities inescapably need citizens formed to defend the laws, not to find pleasure in looking down upon the laws with contempt.

The *Peace* suggests similar limits in what theological revolution will durably achieve. Even at the moment when he is enjoying his great successes in heaven, Trygaeus learns that Zeus is not in fact wholly responsible for the war. Trygaeus is persuaded by Hermes after only a few reminders of the historical record that, con-

20. Peisthetairos excludes eight people from the new city; he welcomes no one (1343–71, 992–1020). While justifying his exclusions, he defends the law and what is moderate and just (1045, 1345–57, 1433–35, 1448–50). In particular he redirects a father-beater to the Thracian front (cf. *Clouds* 1405–39); he excludes an astronomer who reminds of Socrates; and he attempts to persuade the sycophant to find a decent way to make a living.

trary to the view that Zeus thrust the war upon them, the Greeks themselves bear much of the blame. It is true that the Olympians did not work earnestly or effectively to establish peace, and true as well that Zeus finally decided to give Greece over completely to War—and, in most ungodly fashion, did so just in order that he not have to listen any longer to the Greeks' cries for help! But the Greeks themselves turned down chances to make treaties, and the Athenians are represented as having started the war for shameful reasons (605ff.). The very action of the play supports the main features of Hermes' report: not all Greeks favor the excavation of Peace, and Trygaeus himself is less troubled by war in Megara or Sparta, for example, than by war near his own farm in Athens (246–54). War in the abstract is thus not the problem, as Aristophanes' humans see it; it is one's own sufferings in war that are to be avoided. And although Trygaeus successfully absconds from heaven with the goddess Peace, it is not clear that this virtually lifeless, passive, statue-like being will do much to ensure the blessings the Athenian farmers associate with her. Although her heart was reported to be in the right place, she achieved nothing before her entombment by War. When the Greeks began to fight, she simply disappeared (614). She is credited with no independent powers to stop the fighting. She does boast that she came to Athens on her own initiative (665–68), but she came only after the events at Pylos gave peace a chance. Even then, she could do nothing to get the Athenians to ratify a treaty. If she is weak as compared to mortals, she was also no match for War once he was unleashed by Zeus. War, after all, can shout, move under his own power, give terrifying orders, and bury her. The latter part of the play shows divisions among the Athenians, both by trade and by inclination, and one may expect the divisions will again prove too lively for the goddess to pacify.

Speaking more generally, Aristophanes teaches that overthrowing Zeus by overthrowing opinions about Zeus does not eliminate the course of nature and the power of chance. But nature and chance forever frustrate or impede the satisfaction of natural human needs and longings. This is the deepest reason why nothing can do away with the human need for gods. It is an odd thing to say about a play in which men grow wings, but the *Birds* does not depict a fundamental conquest of nature. One may also say that the meaning of "the gods" is equivocal. On the one hand, the intermediate causes of what is most important in our lives may be traced back to the gods. When we think like this, we may hold the gods to be responsible, for example, for our poverty, for our apparent good and bad luck, and perhaps even for the moral demands or dilemmas we face. The gods are the fundamental causes of everything.

At the other extreme, which we take to be closer to Aristophanes' own view, one might try to sort out various causes that underlie these and other aspects of our lives, without tracing those causes back to the gods. We might trace some to chance, others to nature, and still others to law, for example, and to the opinions that human beings hold about the gods. While these opinions will have powerful effects, a change in them does not change nature, chance, or the need for law. In this second view, the discovery of these other causes limits the importance of the gods; this weakening makes their overcoming possible, but also limits its consequences. In Aristophanes' plays, the gods are responsible only for those things for which the opinions of men about the gods are responsible. It appears possible, based on Aristophanes' plays, to overthrow the Olympian gods, and it also appears they deserve it, but the scope and consequences of such an exciting triumph are more limited than might first be thought. Changes to the pantheon may be wished for and encouraged, but the charms of peace, wealth, and natural pleasures will wax and wane with circumstances, even when their influence is increased by associating them with supporting deities. It is worth noting in this connection once again that Aristophanes appears on stage as a Cloud—and the Clouds invoke eight deities, one of whom is Zeus (563–606). Aristophanes along with his Clouds seems more favorable to Zeus than are Socrates and his other rebellious characters. Zeus is shot through with faults, as Aristophanes abundantly shows, but gods will always be needed and—vulnerable though they are—they may not always be so easily replaced. Aristophanes is able to laugh at the Olympians, and at some more than others, without lapsing into a bitter polemic or advancing ardently a program of reform promising once and for all to make things right between men and their gods: that would be to make Aristophanes himself a subject for comedy, for—as he seems to see it—there is no solution to the divine comedy that can resolve once and for all the problems that plague the human situation (and it is by the human situation that gods are judged). Zeus and other gods can be overthrown, and they deserve it. The *Birds*, *Peace*, and *Wealth* encourage kinder and gentler lives for their worshippers. But will Trygaeus and Peace be sufficient to keep the Greeks deeply and durably devoted to peace? Will Chremylos and Wealth be able to solve forever the problem that is forecast by Poverty? Will Peisthetairos and his natural deities live up to the attractive promises that helped to show Zeus's pronounced defects? Some gods are better than others, but all gods, both new and old, have their work cut out for them.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

LANGUAGES ARE SO DIFFERENT that translation cannot be done mechanically; it always requires difficult judgments. Moreover, translators often have different goals. Aristophanes is obscene and offensive, for example, so some may incline to tone his vulgar humor down, as most did a century ago. And he is very funny, so translators naturally try to ensure that their translations are also funny, even if a certain witticism may lead one to stray from the most precise rendering of the Greek text. Because Aristophanes' diction was generally easy for an ancient Athenian to understand, it also may seem reasonable to strive for comparable familiarity in English. "Zeus" may therefore become "God," for example; "just" may become "right" or "fair" or "deserved"; and "soul" may go untranslated altogether. And of course we all enjoy liveliness and variety of expression, so we would like these qualities to be prominent in our English renderings.

The problem is that such tempting adjustments may keep readers from seeing and considering important interpretations of the play. For example, in the parabasis of the *Clouds*, Aristophanes says he wishes to be believed to be *sophos* (520), a word we always render "wise." The close cognates of this word are used at least eighteen times in the *Clouds*, and they certainly appear to be tied to the most important questions raised in the play: Is Socrates as wise as he thinks he is (94, 489, 841)? Is the comic poet Aristophanes in some or even all respects wiser than the philosopher Socrates? Did Aristophanes write his plays for wise spectators in particular (525–26)? Is the Unjust Speech wiser or more foolish than the Just Speech (895, 899, 1057)? Is the radical Euripides wiser than more traditional poets (1370, 1378)? As noted above, however, translators of Aristophanes are tempted to use multiple renderings of the same or related words for the sake of variety, humor, and vigorous diction. Thus, in these eighteen passages linked by *sophos*, the leading recent translation uses eleven different words, including "sage," "sophisticated,"

“brainy,” “ingenious,” “smart,” “sagacious,” et cetera.¹ This is a pleasant variety of words, but they cost the reader the accumulated weight that comes from repeating the same word, which helps one see that wisdom is indeed a central theme of the play. Lost at the same time is the opportunity to compare different claims arising in passages sharing a strong linguistic link. To put this more sharply, we think the comic poet means it when he presents himself as superior in wisdom to the philosopher Socrates; we think he is serious as well about a related question, one raised in Socrates’ “thinkery” and put on stage for Pheidippides: is it wise to follow the traditional laws even if doing so requires one to abstain from leading the most pleasant or best life possible? In the hope of enabling our readers to recognize and to study issues like these, which we consider to be of massive and enduring importance, we are cautious in our pursuit of other charms.

The distinctive feature of our translations is that they strive to be as faithful as possible to Aristophanes’ Greek and to be as consistent as possible in the way they render it into English. We have established these priorities in the belief that Aristophanes is worthy of study not only as a comic poet but also as a thinker; these two categories are not in his case at war with one another. Our introduction defends this case; although difficult of access, the provocative studies of Leo Strauss demonstrate in far greater detail how rewarding a careful study of Aristophanes’ thought can be.² If Aristophanes has a claim to a kind of wisdom as well as to hilarious wit and linguistic brilliance, it becomes that much more important to be painstakingly accurate in moving his plays from an ancient language into a modern one that is very different.

Because there are multiple and conflicting manuscripts of Aristophanes’ plays, translators must first determine what text to translate. Fortunately, new and better editions of his Greek texts have recently been published, and we have taken advantage of them. Although we have been cautious about accepting proposed emendations or corrections of the manuscripts, we have certainly considered them.

We are indebted to the texts, annotations, and translation suggestions in the following: Victor Coulon, ed., and Hilaire Van Daele, trans., *Aristophane Comédies*,

1. Jeffrey Henderson, ed. *Aristophanes: Clouds, Wasp, Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, Loeb Library, 1998).

2. See in particular *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) and *The Rebirth of Classical Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), essays selected and introduced by Thomas L. Pangle, esp. 103–34, 171–73. There are of course other scholars who show great respect for Aristophanes as a thinker, but they are far from representing a majority view.

2nd ed., vols. 2, 3, 5 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, Budé, 2002 and 2009); F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, eds., *Aristophanes Comoediae*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906); Jeffrey Henderson, *Aristophanes*, vols. 2, 3, 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Loeb Library, 1998, 2000, 2002) and *The Maculate Muse*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); S. Douglas Olson, ed., *Aristophanes Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

In addition to disagreements over what Aristophanes actually wrote, uncertainties accompany the assignment of lines to a particular speaker. While there are traditions that assign lines, these traditions are not easily traceable to Aristophanes; the text itself may be our best guide to what speaker spoke particular lines.³ Only in cases of special importance do we note disputes over the text or over the assignment of lines to a particular speaker.

For more complete statements on the challenge of translating ancient Greek and the principles we follow, see Thomas L. Pangle, *The Laws of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. ix–xiv and Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), trans. Wayne Ambler, pp. viii–x.

3. J.C.B. Lowe, "The Manuscript Evidence for Changes of Speaker in Aristophanes," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 9:1 (1962) 35–39.

BIRDS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE¹

EUELPIDES [= “Of Good Hope”]

PEISTHETAIROS [= “Persuasive Comrade” or “Persuaded by Comrades”]

BIRD-SERVANT OF TEREUS

TEREUS, having become a Hoopoe Bird

CHORUS OF BIRDS [and its **LEADER**]

PRIEST

POET

ORACLE-COLLECTOR

METON, a geometer

INSPECTOR [of new colonies, for Athens]

SELLER OF DECREES

MESSENGERS

IRIS [the messenger goddess]

HERALDS

A FATHER BEATER

KINESIAS, a dithyrambic poet

IMPOVERISHED “SYCOPHANT” [a false accuser, who harassed the rich with lawsuits in order to get money by settlements]

PROMETHEUS

POSEIDON

TRIBALLIAN [a barbarian god]

HERACLES

[Mute Characters:

XANTHIAS and **MANODORUS**—also called **MANES**: baggage-carrying slaves who accompany Euelpides and Peisthetairos]

PROCNE

BASILEIA or **QUEEN**]

1. Bracketed material lacks manuscript authority; it is intended only to facilitate a first reading of the play. Line numbers are borrowed from the Greek texts of the plays; they will not always be sequential in English.

*Birds bought in market to lead them to Tereus

→ optimist

→ persuasion

[Enter EUELPIDES and PEISTHETAIROS, the former with a jackdaw, the latter with a crow, and two servants carrying luggage.]

EUELPIDES [to his jackdaw]: Right on? Is *that* what you are bidding—
toward where the tree appears?

PEISTHETAIROS [to his crow]: Split yourself!
[To Euelpides]: This one croaks to go *back*!

EUELPIDES [to his jackdaw]: Why is it, you rogue, that we are wandering up
And down?! We'll perish with this route of weaving about!

PEISTHETAIROS: Woe is me—persuaded by a crow,
To go a roundabout route, more than a thousand stades² long!

EUELPIDES: Ill-fated am I, persuaded by a jackdaw,
To wear off the nails of my toes!

PEISTHETAIROS: But where on earth we are, I no longer know!

EUELPIDES: But from here you could presumably find your way to the
fatherland?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, not even Execestides³ could do it from here!

EUELPIDES: Groan!

PEISTHETAIROS: Pal, you go that way.

EUELPIDES: Indeed, terrible things were done to us two, by that fellow of the
Birds—that bird-tray-selling, black-biled, nut Philocrates,
Who claimed that these two would point out, to us two,
Tereus⁴ (He's that hoopoe-bird who became a bird from those birds.⁵)—
And who sold this jackdaw son of Tharreleides⁶
For an obol, and this one here for three obols—

2. A "stade" is a length of about 600 feet.

3. An Athenian citizen who was apparently under a cloud of suspicion of having barbarian slave ancestry; also mentioned at 764 and 1527.

4. According to the myth dramatized by Sophocles in a play no longer extant, Tereus was a king transformed by the gods into a hoopoe bird.

5. Euelpides comically and momentarily breaks the dramatic illusion, reminding the audience who Tereus is.

6. Apparently some haplessly short and chattering fellow in Athens.

The two of them don't know anything else except how to bite!

20 And *now*, what are *you* gaping at? Is it among the rocks there,
That you are going to drag us again? For there isn't any path *here*!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, there isn't any straight path *here* either!

EUELPIDES: Doesn't the crow say *anything* about the route?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, she isn't croaking the same now as before!

EUELPIDES: Well what does she say about the route?

PEISTHETAIROS: What else does she say, except that by gnawing she'll eat
my fingers!

EUELPIDES: Isn't it simply awful that, when we need and
Are quite prepared to go to the crows,⁷
We can't find the way?

30 For we—Oh you men who are here witnesses to the account⁸—
Are ill, with an illness the opposite of that of Sacas.⁹

For he, not being a citizen, is forcing his way in,
While we, dignified by tribe and lineage,

Citizens among citizens, and on account of no scarecrow,
Have flown up and away from the fatherland with both feet:
Not because we hate that city herself,

As one which is not by nature great, and happy,

And a community for all—to spend their money, in fines and settlements!

For while the cicadas for a month or two only

40 Sing upon the branches, the Athenians *always*
Upon the lawsuits sing—their entire lives away!

That is why we are treading this path,

Carrying basket and pot and myrtle boughs,¹⁰

Wandering in search of a spot without busy troubles,

Where, having settled, we may dwell.

And our goal is Tereus,

*upset w/ Athens

them pay their debts

- P + E = corrupt

7. An idiom equivalent to our modern "go to the dogs."

8. Again, Euelpides breaks the dramatic illusion to address the audience.

9. "Sacas" means "the Scythian," and was applied to the tragedian Acestor, a naturalized Athenian who apparently had some trouble with his citizenship (cf. *Wasps* 1221).

10. Implements for the sacrifice required at the founding of a new city.

The hoopoe, from whom we need to inquire
If he knows of some such city that he has flown over.

PEISTHETAIROS: Here!

EUELPIDES: What is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: The crow, once again,
Points upward!

50

EUELPIDES: And this jackdaw
Gapes up, as if showing me something;
It *must* be that there are birds here.
And we'll know at once, if we make a noise.

PEISTHETAIROS: But do you know what to do? Strike the rock with your leg!¹¹

EUELPIDES: Why don't you do it with your head, so as to make twice the noise!

PEISTHETAIROS: Look, take a stone and knock.

EUELPIDES: Sure, if so it's decided!¹² Boy! Boy!

PEISTHETAIROS: What's this you're saying? You're calling the hoopoe "boy"?!
Shouldn't you call, instead of "boy"—"hoo-po-e"?

EUELPIDES: Hoo-po-e! . . . You'll make me knock again. Hoo-po-e!

BIRD-SERVANT OF THE HOOPOE BIRD: Who are these? Who's the one shouting for the master?

60

EUELPIDES: Apollo shield us from this gaping beak!

SERVANT: Woe of woes! These two are bird hunters!

EUELPIDES: Isn't it terrible?! Not to speak more beautifully!

SERVANT: You two shall perish!

EUELPIDES: But we two are not humans!

SERVANT: What!?

EUELPIDES: I at any rate am a very frightened Libyan bird!¹³

SERVANT: Nonsense!

11. There was a boys' saying: "Strike a rock with your leg and birds will fall down."

12. The formula for something passed by vote in the Assembly.

13. These birds were considered especially prone to defecate when frightened.

EUELPIDES: Well, just look at the stuff at my feet!

SERVANT: And this fellow—what bird is he? Can't you say?

PEISTHETAIROS: I for my part am a shitting Pheasant!

EUELPIDES: But, in the name of the gods, whatever sort of beast are YOU?!

70 **SERVANT:** I, for my part, am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES: Defeated by some fighting cock?

SERVANT: No; but when my master

Became a hoopoe, he then prayed that I might become

A bird, so that he might have a servant following him.

EUELPIDES: So a bird also needs some servant?

SERVANT: This one does, at any rate: I think because he was previously
a human.

Sometimes he gets an erotic passion for eating Phalerian sardines;

So, I run after the sardines, taking a bowl.

He also desires soup, and he needs a ladle and a pot;

So, I run after the ladle.

EUELPIDES: (We have here a running-bird [sandpiper].)

80 **SERVANT:** So, running-bird, you know what you're to do? Call your master for us!

SERVANT: But, by Zeus, he is just now taking a nap,

Having gulped down myrtle and some fleas!

EUELPIDES: All the same, wake him up!

SERVANT: *→ getting King* I know well that
He'll be irritated—but I'll wake him for your sake. [Exit.]

PEISTHETAIROS: May you perish in foul fashion, for you frightened me
to death!

EUELPIDES: Alas! Unhappy am I! I let the jackdaw get away
In my terror!

PEISTHETAIROS: You most cowardly beast!

Out of terror you let the jackdaw go?!

EUELPIDES: Tell me,
Didn't you let go of the crow while you were shitting?

90 **PEISTHETAIROS:** By Zeus, not me!

EUELPIDES: So where is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: Flew away.

EUELPIDES: You didn't let it go? Oh-ho, good fellow, what a MAN you are!

TEREUS [having become a Hoopoe Bird]: Open the wood,¹⁴ so that I may
then go out! → *king*

EUELPIDES: Heracles! What ever is *this* beast?

What is this plumage? What is the fashion of this triple-crested?

HOOPOE: Who are they who seek *me*?

EUELPIDES: It looks like the twelve gods¹⁵ have afflicted you!

HOOPOE: You two mock me, seeing the plumage?! Strangers, *I was* a human!

EUELPIDES: We aren't laughing at *you*!

HOOPOE: Then at what?!

EUELPIDES: It's your beak: that's what appears ridiculous to us.

HOOPOE: It is in such ways that Sophocles abuses me,
In his tragedies about Tereus!

100

EUELPIDES: YOU are Tereus?! Are you a bird, or a peacock?¹⁶

HOOPOE: I am a bird!

EUELPIDES: So then where are your feathers?

HOOPOE: They fell out. → *molted*

EUELPIDES: On account of some illness?

HOOPOE: No, but in the winter, all birds
Molt; and then we grow other feathers again.
But tell me, who *you two* are.

EUELPIDES: Us two? Mortals.

HOOPOE: Of what stock?

EUELPIDES: From where there are the beautiful triremes.

HOOPOE: So you are jurymen?

14. There is a play here on the words for "wood" (*hylē*) and "gate" (*pylē*).

15. The twelve Olympians; a proverbial expression for terrible misfortune.

16. Used metaphorically for a ridiculous dandy (*Acharnians* 63).

EUELPIDES: Rather the contrary, NON-jurymen.

110 **HOOPOE:** Does such a seed get sown *there*?

EUELPIDES: If you search a bit you could get some from the countryside.¹⁷

HOOPOE: Out of need of what business do you two come here?

EUELPIDES: We wish to meet you.

HOOPOE: About what?

EUELPIDES: Because first, you were human, as we two are now,
And you owed money, as we two do now,
And you weren't pleased to pay it back, as we two aren't now;
And then subsequently you have taken on the nature of birds,
And have circled in flight above land and sea,
And are prudent in all things that pertain to human or bird;
120 With these things in view, therefore, we two come now to you, as
Suppliants, that you might point out to us some fleecy city,
In which we might lie down, like some soft goat's-hair cloak.

HOOPOE: So then you seek a city greater than that of the Cranaeans?¹⁸

EUELPIDES: Not greater, but more suitable for us two.

HOOPOE: So, obviously you are looking for an aristocracy.

EUELPIDES: ME?!

Least of all! I loathe the son of Scellius!¹⁹

HOOPOE: Then in what sort of city would you most pleasantly dwell?

EUELPIDES: Where the most troubling business would be of the
following sort:

130 To my door, early in the morning, one of my friends would come,
Saying: "In the name of Olympian Zeus!
You and your children, having festively bathed yourselves,
Come early tomorrow to my place: for I am going to put on a wedding

17. The implication is that rural Athenians were less likely to spend time on juries.

18. Cranaus was one of the first mythic kings of Athens; when he ruled, the Athenians called themselves Cranaeans, and the city Cranae; from his daughter, Atthis, the land got its name Attica.

19. Aristocrates, son of Scellius, became a leader in the oligarchic regime that ruled Athens for a short while in 411 B.C., three years after the *Birds* was first produced.

Feast; now don't do anything else! If you don't come,
Then don't ever come to me at a time when I am faring *badly!*"

HOOPOE: By Zeus, you *do* have an erotic passion for affairs of misery!
And you?

PEISTHETAIROS: I too have an erotic passion for such things.

HOOPOE: For which?

PEISTHETAIROS: Where a father, having encountered me, blames me in
regards to

His blooming son, as if he's suffered an injustice, in the following
Terms: "A fine thing it is—you showoff!—when you encountered my
Son, coming away from the gymnasium, freshly bathed:

And you failed to kiss him, to speak with him, to put the make on
Him, to fondle his balls—you! who have been my ancestral friend!"

HOOPOE: Ah, you poor fellow! What ills you *do* have an erotic passion for!
But there is a city happy in the way you two say—
On the coast of the Red Sea!²⁰

EUELPIDES: Egad, no! NOT on the sea coast, where the "Salaminia"²¹ will
show up,

Some early morning, carrying a herald!
Can't you point out to us some Greek city?

HOOPOE: Why don't you go dwell in Elis, at Lepreum?

EUELPIDES: Because, by the gods, though I haven't seen it,
I loathe "Lepreum," on account of Melanthius!²²

HOOPOE: But there are others—the Opuntians in Locris—
Among whom you ought to settle.

EUELPIDES: But I at any rate would never become an Opuntius,²³
Even for a mass of gold!
But, what's it like living with the birds?—
For you know with precision.

→ want to persue
their desires
indulges in
recreation

140

→ trying to find them
a city

150

20. Equivalent to our "over the rainbow" (see also *Knights* 1088).

21. The ship the city sent out to catch those fleeing indictments.

22. A tragic poet who suffered from leprosy [*lepra*]; referred to also at *Peace* 1009.

23. A one-eyed fellow (see 1294 below) and a sycophant.

HOOPOE: It's not unpleasing, as time passes.

In the first place, you need to live without a purse.

EUELPIDES: That does away with a great deal of the dishonesty in life!

HOOPOE: And we graze the gardens for white sesame,

160 And myrtle, and poppy seeds, and mint.

EUELPIDES: So then you live the life of newlyweds!²⁴

PEISTHETAIROS: Whoa! Whoa! I have a great insight into a project for the
race of birds,

And the power that would come about, if you would be persuaded by me!

HOOPOE: Persuaded by you in what?

PEISTHETAIROS: In *what* should you be persuaded?—First,

Don't fly around everywhere gaping!

For this is a dishonorable business. Among us,

If you were to ask about those who flit around,

"Who's this?" Teleas²⁵ will say as follows:

"The human's a bird—weightless, flighty,

170 Wavering, never staying put in any way."

HOOPOE: By Dionysus, in these respects your blame is on target!

So what *should* we do?

PEISTHETAIROS: Dwell in a single city.

HOOPOE: What sort of a city could we dwell in as birds?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Truly, "you have pronounced the most stupid utterance"²⁶—
Look down below!

HOOPOE: I'm looking.

PEISTHETAIROS: Now look up!

HOOPOE: I'm looking.

PEISTHETAIROS: Turn your neck!

24. A cake containing the preceding ingredients was traditionally eaten by newlyweds.

25. Thought to be a wealthy political figure; also satirized in fragments of the comic poets Phrynicus and Plato; see also 1024–25 and *Peace* 1009. The joke of referring to him in this context has been lost.

26. A spoofing quotation or echo of some unknown tragic verse. For comic effect, Aristophanes mimics tragic diction as well as tragic scenes.

HOOPOE: By Zeus,
I'll have enjoyment for sure, if I wrench my neck!

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you see anything?

HOOPOE: The clouds and the heaven.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, is not this the vault [*polos*] of the birds?!

HOOPOE: "*Polos*?"—In what sense?

PEISTHETAIROS: Even as if someone would say "place."

Because this "moves about" [*poletai*], and everything

Proceeds on account of this, it is now called "*polos*."

But if once you were to settle and fortify this,

From being called "*polos*," it would become "*polis* [city]!"

And the result would be, that you would rule over humans as [you do]
over locusts,

And the very gods you would destroy, with a Melian famine!²⁷

HOOPOE: How?

PEISTHETAIROS: Surely, the air is in between, in relation to the earth:

And so, even as, when we wish to go to the Pythia [Delphic oracle],

We have to request passage of the Boeotians,

In the same way, when humans sacrifice to the gods,

If the gods do not bring tribute to you,

Then through the polis that does not belong to them, and the void,

You will not let the savor of the thigh meat through!

HOOPOE: Hey! Wow! By Earth, by snares, by "Clouds,"²⁸ by nets!

Never have I heard so elegant a conceit!

So I would indeed found with you the city,

If the other birds agree! → end of being hostile to idea

PEISTHETAIROS: So who will explain the affair to them?

27. A dual reference: 1) to the famous Athenian reduction of Melos by siege and starvation (see Thucydides 5.89–116), which occurred about a year before this play was first produced; and 2) also to philosophic atheism—Socrates is called "the Melian" in *Clouds* 830 because he is associated with the notorious atheistic philosopher "Diagoras the Melian" (referred to below at 1073); and in the *Clouds*, Socrates and his students are portrayed as starving ascetics.

28. "Cloud" was a term for a fine bird net; see also 528; but this is also one of many echoes of the *Clouds*.

HOOPOE: You! For I have taught them, who were previously barbarians,
 200 To speak—having spent a lot of time with them.

PEISTHETAIROS: How do you call them together?

HOOPOE: Easily; for as soon as I step into the thicket here,
 And then wake up my nightingale,
 She and I will call them. And they, if they
 Hear our two voices, will come running!

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh you dearest of birds! Now don't you delay!
 But I beseech you, as quickly as possible
 Go into the thicket and wake up the nightingale!

HOOPOE: Come, my mate, leave off sleeping,
 210 And let loose the tunes of the sacred hymns,
 By which you lament through your divine mouth
 The much bewailed Itys, my [child] and yours—
 Warbling with flowing songs
 From your trilling mouth!
 The pure echo proceeds, through the leafy
 Yew, to the seats of Zeus,
 Where golden-haired Phoebus [Apollo] hears;
 And, in response to your elegies, plucks
 Upon an ivory harp, to set in motion
 220 The choruses of the gods! And from the immortal
 Mouth there issues a divine resonance,
 A cry of the blessed ones!

[A song is heard.]

PEISTHETAIROS [or **EUELPIDES**]²⁹: King Zeus! What a voice the bird has!—
 Such as to pour honey over the entire thicket!

EUELPIDES [or **PEISTHETAIROS**]: Here he is!

PEISTHETAIROS [or **EUELPIDES**]: What?

EUELPIDES [or **PEISTHETAIROS**]: Won't you shut up?!

PEISTHETAIROS [or **EUELPIDES**]: What's the matter?

29. The attribution of the lines here is disputed: the earliest printed edition has the attributions indicated in brackets, against the more authoritative manuscripts that we now have.

EUELPIDES [or **PEISTHETAIROS**]: The hoopoe is preparing to sing again!

HOOPOE: Epopoi! Popopopopopoi!

Ahoi! Ahoi! Come, come, come, come!

Come here, who is of my feathered race!

As many of you as upon the well-sown country fields

230

Feed—ten thousand tribes of barley-eaters,

And races of seed-pickers,

Swift of flight, soft of voice;

As many of you as frequently twitter around the furrow's clod,

So light, in your pleasing voice.

Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio!

And you who upon the ivy shoots in gardens

Have your grazing,

And who upon the mountains eat wild olive berries,

240

And arbutus—

Complete your flight to my voice!

Trioto! Trioto! Totobrix!

You who seize the sharp-biting fleas near the marshy glens,

And as many as possess

The dewy places of the earth

And the broad plain of Marathon:

The motley-plumed bird—

The Moorhen! The Moorhen!

Let the tribes flying on the salty swell of the sea,

250

With the Halcyons,

Come hither to learn new things!

For we are here gathering all tribes

Of the birds with outstretched necks!

For a certain sharp elder³⁰ has arrived,

Of strange judgment,

Who is taking in hand strange deeds!

But come, everyone, to the discussions—

Hither, hither, hither, hither!

30. The word translated as "elder" (*presbus*) can also mean "wren."

260 **CHORUS OF THE BIRDS:** Torotorotorotorotix!
 Kikkabaw! kikkabaw!
 Torotorotorotorolililiix!

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you see any bird?

EUELPIDES: By Apollo! Not I!—
 Yet I've looked up gaping into heaven!

PEISTHETAIROS: In vain, then, it looks like the Hoopoe went into
 the thicket,
 And clucked in imitation of the Lapwing!³¹

A CERTAIN BIRD: Torotix! Torotix!

PEISTHETAIROS: But my good fellow, here's one bird coming now!

EUELPIDES: By Zeus, a bird indeed! What in the world sort? Surely not
 a Peacock!

270 **PEISTHETAIROS:** This one here will himself explain to us: What IS
 this bird?

HOOPOE: This is not one of the usual things you always see,
 But, rather, a water bird.

EUELPIDES: Wow! Beautiful and purple!

HOOPOE: But of course: and its name is in fact "Purple-feathered."

EUELPIDES: Hey, psst, you there!

PEISTHETAIROS: Why are you yelling?

EUELPIDES: Here is another bird!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, another indeed, and "this one in a land that is
 not its place!"³²

Whatever is this out-of-place, mountain-treading "prophet-of-Muses?"³³

HOOPOE: "Mede" is the name of this one.

PEISTHETAIROS: "Mede?!" Lord Heracles!
 Then how, being a Mede, did it fly here without a camel?

31. A bird that, in order to decoy enemies, flies far from its nest and pretends to call its young to it.

32. A spoofing quote from Sophocles' lost tragedy *Tyro*.

33. A spoofing quote from Aeschylus's lost tragedy *Edonians*.

EUELPIDES: Here is yet another bird, with a crest.

PEISTHETAIROS: What's this prodigy?! So you're NOT the only hoopoe, but
this is another?! 280

HOOPOE: This one is the son of Philocles the Hoopoe,³⁴
And I'm his grandfather—even as you would say,
“Hipponicus the son of Callias,” and “Callias son of Hipponicus.”³⁵

PEISTHETAIROS: So this bird is Callias?!—Look! He's shedding!

EUELPIDES: Yes, for since he is well born, he is plucked by the sycophants,
And the females as well come to pluck his feathers.

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh Poseidon!—what is this next dyed bird!
What ever is the name of this one?!

HOOPOE: This one is “Glutton.”

PEISTHETAIROS: Is there another glutton besides Cleonymus?

EUELPIDES: How could he be Cleonymus, when he hasn't thrown away
his crest?!³⁶ 290

PEISTHETAIROS: But why all this crest business among the birds?
Are they going to run the double-course [armored] race?

HOOPOE: It's like the Carians, my good man,
Who live on their mountain crests for security reasons.

PEISTHETAIROS: By Poseidon! Don't you see how much mischief is implied
in the
Birds' drawing around together?

EUELPIDES: Lord Apollo! What a cloud! Alas!
It is no longer possible to discern the *exits*³⁷ on account of them flying in!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here is a Partridge!

34. Philocles, whose nickname was apparently “Lark” (see 1295) was a tragedian who had also (like Sophocles) written a tragedy about Tereus.

35. A very wealthy and prominent Athenian, who figures in the Socratic writings of Xenophon and Plato.

36. A favorite butt of Aristophanes (*Acharnians* 88; *Knights* 958; *Wasps* 19; *Clouds* 353), who is referred to as a notorious coward and glutton, who threw away his shield at the battle of Delium; see also 1475. The joke turns on the two meanings of *lophos*, “crest of feathers on a bird” and “crest of horsehair on a war helmet.”

37. Once again, Euelpides comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

EUELPIDES: And those, by Zeus, are Moorhens!

PEISTHETAIROS: And here's a Widgeon!

EUELPIDES: And there's a Halcyon!

What's this behind her?

PEISTHETAIROS: This? A Clipper.

300 **EUELPIDES:** Is a "Clipper" a bird?

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, isn't Sporgilus?³⁸—and here's an owl.

EUELPIDES: What are you saying?! Who brought an owl here to Athens!?³⁹

HOOPOE: Jay, Turtledove, Lark, Sedgebird, Thyme-finch, Ring-cove,
Rock-dove, Stock-dove, Cuckoo, Falcon, Fiery-crest, Willow-hen,
Lammergeyer, Porphyron, Kestrel, Waxwing, Nuthatch, Water-hen.

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad! The birds! Double egad! The Blackbirds!
How they twitter, and run about shrieking!
Are they then threatening us? Alas! Their beaks are gaping
And they are staring at you and me!

EUELPIDES: That's how it seems to me too!

310 **CHORUS:** Popopopopopopopopoi!
WHOoooooooo then has summoned me?
In what place does he browse?

HOOPOE: Here I am, as of old, never far from my friends!

CHORUS: What? What? What-What-What-What-What-What?—
What speech then do you have to please me?

HOOPOE: One that is in common, and safe, and just, and pleasant, and
beneficial!

For a pair who are subtle men of reason have arrived at my place here!

CHORUS: Where? How? What do you mean?

320 **HOOPOE:** I am saying that two old men have arrived here from humans!
And they come having the root of a prodigious affair!

38. Apparently a well-known barber in Athens.

39. The owl was the sacred bird of Athena, and hence a proverb about bringing them to Athens, equivalent to "carrying coals to Newcastle." Once again Euelpides comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

CHORUS LEADER: Oh you greatest sinner of all my entire days!
What *are* you saying?!

HOOPOE: Now, now, don't be afraid of speech!

CHORUS LEADER: *What* have you done to me?

HOOPOE: I've welcomed two men, erotically passionate for intercourse
with us!

CHORUS LEADER: Have you really done this deed?!

HOOPOE: And I am pleased to have done it!

CHORUS LEADER: And are the two now somewhere among us?!

HOOPOE: If I am among you!

CHORUS: Ai Yi Yi! We are betrayed and suffer impious injuries!

He who was a friend and nourished together with us,

Who browsed the fields with us,

Has overstepped ancient laws,

Has overstepped the oaths of birds!

He summoned us into a trap, and has thrown me to

That impious species, which has, since the time it was born,

Against me waged war!

But we'll settle the account with this fellow later!

It is my judgment that these two old men will pay the just penalty

And be torn to pieces by us!

330

PEISTHETAIROS: So we are destroyed then!

EUELPIDES: You alone are to blame for these evils that now befall us!

For why did you draw me hither?!

340

PEISTHETAIROS: So that you would follow me!

EUELPIDES: Sure, so that I would weep to the utmost!

PEISTHETAIROS: In this you are an extreme babbler!

For how will you weep—once you have had your eyes gouged out?!

CHORUS: Hey! Hey!

Attack! Charge! Bear down with hostile,

Bloody assault, throw wings all around them,

And surround them!

For the two must both scream

And supply food for the beak!

For there does not exist a shady mountain, or ethereal cloud,

350 Or hoary sea that shall be a

Refuge of these two fleeing me!

But we will now not hesitate to pluck and to bite these two!

Where is the rank commander? Let him lead, on the right flank!

EUELPIDES: This is it! Where shall I flee in my wretchedness?

PEISTHETAIROS: Stand, won't you fellow?!

EUELPIDES: To be torn to pieces by these?!

PEISTHETAIROS: But how do you think you'll run away from 'em?!

EUELPIDES: I don't know how!

PEISTHETAIROS: But I am telling you,

We must make a stand, and fight, using the pots!

EUELPIDES: How are *pots* going to help us two?

PEISTHETAIROS: An owl will then never come near the two of us!⁴⁰

EUELPIDES: But what about these with the talons here?

PEISTHETAIROS: Snatch up a spit,

360 And then plant it before you!

EUELPIDES: What about these eyes of mine?

PEISTHETAIROS: Grab a vinegar cruet and hold it before them! Or a saucer!

EUELPIDES: Oh wisest one! You figured that out well, and like a general!

You outshoot Nicias⁴¹ with your devices!

CHORUS: Hey! Hey! Hey! Advance with your beaks poised! No hesitations!

Draw! Pluck! Strike! Tear! First break the pot!

HOOPOE: Tell me, you worst of all beasts, why are you about to

Destroy these two men from whom you have suffered nothing,

And to slay these who are kin and tribesmen of my wife?!⁴²

40. Pots are frightening to birds because birds are cooked in them. Pots were understood to be under Athena's protection, as products of her inspiration of art and craft. Cf. *Acharnians* 284.

41. The famous Athenian general, who had won a victory (which proved to be short-lived) at Syracuse the autumn before the play was first presented (Thucydides 6.63–71).

42. Procne the wife of Tereus was of the ancient Athenian royal house before the gods transformed her into a bird along with her husband.

CHORUS LEADER: Are we to spare these any more than wolves?!

Whom would we punish who are more hostile than these?

370

HOOPOE: But what if, while in nature they are hostile, in mind they
are friendly,

And have come hither to teach you something useful?

CHORUS LEADER: But how could these ever teach or communicate to us
Something useful—they who were enemies to our grandsires?

HOOPOE: But from enemies surely the wise learn many things.

For caution saves all things. From a friend,

You would not learn this; but an enemy compels you to do so at once.

Again, it is from men who are enemies, not friends, that cities learn

To labor at building high walls, and to acquire great ships;

And this sort of learning saves children, home, and property.

380

CHORUS LEADER: It is indeed useful, it seems to me, to hear first
the speeches;

For one might learn something wise even from enemies.

PEISTHETAIROS: They are slackening the bridle of their rage. Move
rearwards.

HOOPOE: And it is just; and you all ought to accord gratitude to me.

CHORUS: But we have not ever before opposed you in any other matter.

PEISTHETAIROS: They rather make peace, by Zeus! So let down the pot,
And the saucer.

But the spear—the spit—we must

Keep as we walk around,

Inside the weapons, looking out

Over the top rim of the pot.

For we two must not flee!

390

EUELPIDES: But really, if we should die,

Where in the earth will we be buried?

PEISTHETAIROS: The Cerameicus⁴³ will receive us.

For in order that we will receive public burial,

43. A suburb of Athens where was situated the cemetery for veterans who died in battle; also the potters' quarter in Athens.

We will declare to the generals
That we two died fighting the enemies
In Orneae.⁴⁴

400 **CHORUS LEADER:** Fall back in ranks again to the same place,
And, bending, let down your spiritedness, next to your anger,
Like a hoplite!⁴⁵
And we will inquire from these the while who they might be, and
From whence they came,
And with what thought in mind.
Ahoy! Hoopoe, I call you!

HOOPOE: Do you call, in a mood to listen?

CHORUS LEADER: Who ever are these, and from whence?

HOOPOE: A pair of strangers, from wise Greece.

410 **CHORUS LEADER:** What fortune
Ever brings the pair
To come to the birds?

HOOPOE: An erotic passion for the way of life,
And for dwelling among you,
And having every sort of intercourse among you.

CHORUS LEADER: What are you saying? What speeches have they to say?

HOOPOE: Incredible and wild to hear.

CHORUS LEADER: Does he see some gain worth abiding here for,
Which he believes that he would make by being with me,
420 And by which he would overpower an enemy, or
Be able to benefit friends?

HOOPOE: He speaks of a great prosperity—
Unutterable and incredible!—he incites,
Saying how all things are yours,

44. A very ancient town in Argolis, whose name sounds like the Greek word for “bird” (*ornis*). In the year before the play was first presented, the town was taken by Sparta and then besieged, taken, and razed by Athens and her allies: there was no battle, and no one died, because the defenders slipped away.

45. There is here a parody of a standard hoplite maneuver.

What is here, and what is there, and
What is over there!

CHORUS LEADER: So he's crazy?

HOOPOE: Unspeakably prudent!

CHORUS LEADER: There's wisdom in his mind?

HOOPOE: The sharpest fox,

430

Sophist-like, a swindler, a trickster, thoroughly subtle.⁴⁶

CHORUS LEADER: Bid him speak, speak to me!

For after hearing the things you say to me
I'm aflutter at the words!

HOOPOE: Come then, you! and you!—This weaponry

Hang back up again, with good fortune,

By the oven corner inside, near the trivet.

And you, as regards those speeches, concerning which I issued the
Summons, teach and expound to these.

PEISTHETAIROS:

By Apollo, I will not!—

Unless they contract with me the very covenant which

440

That ape—the swordmaker⁴⁷—contracted with his wife: that these

Are neither to bite me, nor to yank my balls, nor to poke me in my—

EUELPIDES: You don't mean—

PEISTHETAIROS

Not at all, no!—I'm speaking of the *eyes*.

CHORUS LEADER: I make the covenant.

PEISTHETAIROS:

Now swear these things to me!

CHORUS LEADER: I swear—but on the following conditions: that I'm judged

Victorious, by all the judges and all the spectators!⁴⁸

PEISTHETAIROS:

So it shall be!

CHORUS: *And*, if I do breach the covenant, then I'm victorious if by only a
single judge's vote!

46. The terms for "trickster" and "subtle" recall the qualities that Socrates promises to educate Strepsiades in (*Clouds* 260).

47. A reference to a certain Panetius, who was short and ugly.

48. Here the chorus comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

HERALD: Listen to the people! The hoplites are now
 To withdraw back homeward taking their weapons,
 450 And are to watch to see what we post, in writing, on the bulletin boards!

CHORUS: Guileful always in every way
 Is the human by nature. But still, speak to me.
 For probably you may happen to express
 Something worthy that you see in me; or
 Some greater power,
 Overlooked by my un-clever mind.
 But speak to the community about what you have seen.
 For whatever good you might happen
 To provide for me, this will be shared in common with you.
 460 Whatever business it is that you have come to persuade us of your
 knowledge of,
 Speak it out boldly. For we will not be the first to violate the treaty.

PEISTHETAIROS: Now I am impassioned, by Zeus! And a speech is
 fermenting within me,
 That I will not be stopped from kneading. Come, boy, the crowning
 Wreath! Let someone quickly bring water to pour over my hands!

EUELPIDES: (Are we going to feast? or what?)⁴⁹

PEISTHETAIROS: (By Zeus, no! I seek to speak some great, old, and fatted
 word,
 Such as will break down the soul of these!) How I *do* feel pain
 For you all! Who once were kings—

CHORUS: US! Kings?! Over *what*?

PEISTHETAIROS: YOU were kings, of all that is—of me in the first place,
 and of this
 Fellow, and of Zeus Himself! More ancient than, and first before, Kronos
 and Titans,
 Did you come into being!—and before Earth as well!

49. A wreath of myrtle was worn by an orator as he spoke; the wreath was also worn at banquets. Hands were washed before dining, but also before any solemn affair.

birds
were
first

CHORUS: Earth as well?

PEISTHETAIROS: Yes, by Apollo!

CHORUS: Now this, by Zeus, I had never learned! 470

PEISTHETAIROS: That's because you are by nature unlearned and overly busy, and

Have not pondered Aesop: Who declares

In speech that a bird, the crested lark, came into being first of all,

Prior to Earth—and then her father fell ill, and died;

And since Earth did not exist, his corpse laid out for five days; and that she, at a loss,

And lacking devices, finally buried her father in her head!

EUELPIDES: (So then the father of the crested lark lies dead in the "Head-land?!"⁵⁰)

PEISTHETAIROS: Now, are not those who came into being prior to Earth, and prior to gods,

Since they are themselves eldest, correctly possessed of the kingship?

EUELPIDES: By Apollo! You had better tend your beak from now on!

Zeus won't quickly surrender His scepter to an oak-pecker! 480

PEISTHETAIROS: For, that of old it was not the gods who ruled over humans,

But the birds, as monarchs, there is here much evidence.

First, I point out to you the rooster, and how he tyrannized

And ruled over the Persians, before all those Dariuses and Megabazuses,

So that he is still called the "Persian bird" on account of that rule.⁵¹

EUELPIDES: (So that's why even now, like the great king,⁵² he struts about

And alone of the birds carries on his head the erect tiara!)

PEISTHETAIROS: So mighty and very great was he once, that even now,

On account of his strength at that time, when he merely sings the

Dawn, everybody jumps up to their work—in bronze, in pottery,

in tannery,

50. "Head," *Kephalē*, was an Attic district or *deme* where was situated a large cemetery.

51. Roosters, originating in India, were originally bought from Persian merchants.

52. I.e., the Persian emperor.

→ his evidence of birds rule
↓
v. flattering convenience to buy

In shoemaking, as bath-attendant, as grain traders, in lyre and shield
 construction on the lathe;
 While it's still night they run, putting on their sandals.

EUELPIDES:

Just ask me!

For I lost my cloak of Phrygian wool on account of this, to that wicked
 Fellow! For once, when I was invited to a child's tenth-day celebration⁵³
 in the city, I drank too much,
 And then went to sleep; and before the others had feasted, this one
 crowed;
 And I, supposing it was dawn, headed for Halimus;⁵⁴ and, just as I
 Am stooping outside the wall, a robber hits me on the back with a
 Club! And I fall, and am about to cry out, but he's plucked off my cloak!

PEISTHETAIROS: And the kite then ruled as king over the Greeks!

500 **CHORUS:** Over the Greeks?!

PEISTHETAIROS:

And that one, when he was first our king,
 Taught us to go down on our knees before kites.⁵⁵

EUELPIDES:

(By Dionysus, for my part

I certainly got down on my knees when I saw a kite—and then, gaping
 Upward, I swallowed an obol!⁵⁶ . . . And I dragged home an empty purse.)

PEISTHETAIROS: And the cuckoo was king over Egypt and all of Phoenicia;
 And when the cuckoo said “cuckoo!” it was then that all the
 Phoenicians harvested the wheat and barley, in their fields.⁵⁷

EUELPIDES: (So that's why the proverb is truly spoken: “Cuckoo! To the
 fields, with stiff peckers!”)

PEISTHETAIROS: And such a rule did they exercise, that if someone ruled
 as king

53. Children were named in a celebration on the tenth day after birth.

54. A district or *deme* about four miles outside of Athens; apparently a home of Euelpides, who is thus identified as a rural character (see also 585 and 645—where Euelpides is said to come from another rural *deme*).

55. The kite reappeared in Greece each year as a harbinger of Spring, and the Greeks therefore went down on their knees at the sight of one at that time of year.

56. Lacking pockets in their cloaks, Greeks often carried small coins in their mouths.

57. To understand the following response of Euelpides: the word “barley” means in slang an erect phallus (after the shape and appearance of the stalk), and the word “field,” associated with “plowing,” means a woman's genitals.

In the cities of the Greeks—an Agamemnon or a Menelaus—
A bird used to perch on their scepters, to partake of whatever gifts
they received!

510

EUELPIDES: (This I did not know! And indeed I've been struck with
amazement,
Whenever, in the tragedies, some Priam has come out, with a bird;
It must be that the latter perches there to watch out for what gifts
Lysicrates⁵⁸ received!)

PEISTHETAIROS: And, what is most awesome of all, Zeus, the present king,
Stands having the eagle-bird perched on His head as emblem of kingship;
And His daughter, again, has an owl; and Apollo, being a servant, has
a falcon!

EUELPIDES: By Demeter! You speak these things well! But what's the point
of their having these?

PEISTHETAIROS: In order that, when someone is sacrificing, and puts into
the hand of the gods, according to law,
The innards, *these* may take the innards, *before* Zeus does!
Besides, no human used to swear by a god, but all swore by birds.
And Lampon still now swears by the goose, whenever he practices
a deception.⁵⁹

520

SO: everyone previously believed *you* to be great and hallowed,
But now—slaves, simpletons, nobodies!⁶⁰

Now, as if you were insane,
They pelt you; and in the temples,
Everyone is a bird-catcher of you,
Setting up nooses, traps, sticks,
Snares, “clouds,” nets, cages;
And when they take you, they sell you in flocks;
And those who buy you feel you up!
And they don't stop, if they feel like doing it,
At cooking and serving you up.

530

58. A notoriously corrupt general, according to the scholia.

59. Lampon was a prominent authority on oracles and religious ritual; the word for “goose,” *chēna*, differs by only one letter from the word for Zeus, *zēna*.

60. Literally, “Maneses”—a common name for a slave.

But they grate cheese, add oil,
 Silphium, and vinegar, and, whipping up
 A sauce that is sweet and oily,
 They then pour this, heated,
 Over you—
 As if you were so much carrion!

CHORUS: Far, far the harshest of accounts⁶¹

540 Have you brought, Oh human! How I weep
 At the vice of my fathers, who,
 Having such honors as these handed down from their ancestors,
 Squandered them for me!
 But you, in accordance with a divinity and a good, lucky coincidence,
 Have come to me as a savior!
 For I will live having offered up to you
 My nestlings and myself!

CHORUS LEADER: But whatever it is that ought to be done, you stay and
 teach: for we hold life

Not worth living, if we do not obtain our kingship in every respect!

550 **PEISTHETAIROS:** Now, my teaching is that, in the first place, there is to be a
 single city of the birds,
 And then, that all the air around, and this entire middle part,
 Is to be surrounded with a wall made of great baked bricks, like Babylon.

EUELPIDES: Oh Cebrione and Porphyrion!⁶² How terrible is this city
 fortification!

PEISTHETAIROS: And then, when this has been set up, demand back the
 rule from Zeus!

And if he refuses, and is unwilling, and fails to submit immediately,
 A Holy War proclaim against Him, and forbid the gods

From traversing your territory with erections,

As they have in the past, descending for adulteries with their Alcmenes,

↓
 can't
 come to
 earth

61. This line looks like a parody of line 442 of Euripides' tragedy *Alcestis*.

62. Two of the Giants who were leaders in the war with the Olympian gods; porphyrion is also the name of a water fowl—see lines 707, 882. At line 1249, Peisthetairos tells Iris that he will send six hundred porphyrones through the air to attack Zeus if Zeus troubles him further.

And Alopes, and Semeles.⁶³ And if they do try to traverse, you'll clap a seal around

Their erections, rendering them unable to fuck the girls in the future!

And to humans, I urge that another bird be sent as herald, with the word that,

From here on, they are to sacrifice to birds, since the birds are the kings,

And to gods only afterwards. And they are to apportion in a fitting way

Birds to the gods, whichever bird is most in accord with each:

If it is to Aphrodite that one is going to sacrifice, then sacrifice barley grains⁶⁴ to the "*Phall-eris*" bird;

If one is going to sacrifice a sheep to Poseidon, let him consecrate wheat grains to a duck;

If one is going to sacrifice something to Heracles, let him sacrifice kneaded honey cakes to a gull;⁶⁵

And, if one is going to sacrifice a ram to Zeus the king, let the king be the kinglet-wren,⁶⁶

To whom one must, prior to Zeus Himself, slaughter an ant—equipped with balls!

EUELPIDES: I get a kick out of that slaughtered ant: Thunder away, Oh great Zan!⁶⁷

CHORUS: And how will humans ever believe us to be gods, and not jackdaws—

We who fly and have wings?

PEISTHETAIROS: You're driveling! By Zeus, Hermes at any rate, Being a god, flies and has wings!—As do very many other gods!

63. Mortal women: Alcmene and Semele had intercourse with Zeus and bore, respectively, the hero Heracles and the god Dionysus; Alopes bore the hero Hippothoon to Poseidon.

64. Slang for the erect phallus. It is enough in the following lines to note the comic links between bird and god; the additional wordplay is difficult to follow.

65. The gull was proverbially voracious, as was Heracles, in comedy. See 1583–90 and 1685–92 and *Frogs* 62.

66. The name used for this bird is obscure and has the same root as the slang term for testicles used in the next line; there seems to be here a reference to a fable in Aesop where the wren becomes king of the birds by the test of which can fly higher: when the eagle appeared at first to win by soaring to its maximum height, the clever wren, who had hidden in the eagle's feathers, took off and soared even higher.

67. Euelpides uses the Doric word for "Zeus."

→ gods won't
be able
to have
sex
anymore

560

→ starve gods
by sacrificing

570

Victory, for instance, flies with golden wings! And also Eros, by Zeus!
And Homer says that Iris resembles “a timorous wild pigeon.”⁶⁸

EUELPIDES: But won't Zeus thunder, and send winged lightning down
on us?!

PEISTHETAIROS: And if they still, out of ignorance, believe you to
be nothing,
And the gods to be these who are on Olympus, then it will be necessary
for a united cloud of sparrows,
And seed-pluckers, to gobble up their seeds from the fields;
580 And then let Demeter measure out grain to them in their starvation!

EUELPIDES: By Zeus, She won't be willing, but you'll see her coming up
with excuses!

PEISTHETAIROS: And again: the crows shall pluck out the eyes of the
oxen, with
Which they plough the earth, and of their sheep—as proof of your power!
And then let Apollo, who is the Healer, heal them; and earn his fee!

EUELPIDES: No!—not until I've sold my own two little oxen!

PEISTHETAIROS: But: If they hold YOU to be God, you Life, you Earth, you
Kronos, you Poseidon,
Every good thing shall be theirs!

CHORUS LEADER [or **HOOPOE**]⁶⁹: Tell me one of the good things.

PEISTHETAIROS: First, the locusts will not eat up their grape-flowers,
But instead, a single regiment of owls and kestrels will bear down upon
the locusts!

590 And then, the bugs and mites will not always eat up the figs,
But instead, a single flock of thrushes will pick the figs all clean!

HOOPOE: But from what source will we make them wealthy? For this is what
especially their erotic passion is for!

PEISTHETAIROS: When they come to seek divinatory advice, these will give
to them mines of worth;

68. In the Homeric *Hymn to Delian Apollo* 114.

69. The major manuscripts differ on the attribution of the lines here and as indicated in what follows.

And they will inform the seer about profitable voyages of trade,
So that no ship owner will be destroyed.

HOOPOE [or CHORUS LEADER]: How will none be destroyed?

PEISTHETAIROS: One of the birds will always warn the one seeking
divinatory advice concerning the sailing:

“Now is not the time to sail, a storm is coming!”; “sail now, there’ll
be profit!”

EUELPIDES: I’m going to buy a merchant ship and become a ship owner! I’m
not going to stay with you folks!

PEISTHETAIROS: And they will point out to them the treasures of money
that people

Have previously buried. For these know. Everyone says:

“No one knows where my treasure is, unless it’s a little birdy!”

600

EUELPIDES: I’m selling the merchant ship! I’m going to buy a shovel, and
dig up the urns!

HOOPOE: But how will they give them health, which is in the lap of the gods?

PEISTHETAIROS: If they prosper, is this not great health? Know clearly,
That a human whose affairs are going badly is simply not one who’s in
good health!

CHORUS LEADER: But how will they ever make it to old age? For this is in
the hands of Olympus—
Or must they die in childhood?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, No! But three hundred additional years will
The birds add to their lifespan!

CHORUS LEADER: From where?

PEISTHETAIROS: From where? From themselves!
Don’t you know that “five human generations lives the cawing crow?”⁷⁰

EUELPIDES: Wow! These are by far mightier kings for us than Zeus!

610

PEISTHETAIROS: For is it not so, by far?

70. From a speech by the Nymphs, in a poem of Hesiod’s of which we possess only a fragment containing this line, quoted by Plutarch (*On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 415c) to show that according to Hesiod even the Nymphs and other demigods are mortal.

First, no temple
 Need we build for them, of stones,
 Nor gated with golden gates,
 But instead in thickets and small trees
 They will dwell. And again, for the august among
 The birds, the olive tree
 Will be the temple! And neither to Delphi
 Nor to Ammon will we go to
 620 Sacrifice, but among the arbutus trees
 And the wild olives we will stand, holding
 Barley grains and wheat, praying to them
 With outstretched hands
 To give us a portion of the good things; and these things will
 At once be given to us,
 When we cast down a few wheat grains!

CHORUS LEADER: Oh you dearest one to me by far of elders, who has
 changed from being most hated!
 It is not possible that I should ever again voluntarily depart from
 your judgment!

CHORUS: Exulting at your words,
 630 I threaten and I swear, that
 If you, after having established with me
 Words of like-minded agreement,
 That are just, guileless, and pious,⁷¹
 Go to confront the gods, united with me
 In judgment, then, in not much time
 The gods will no longer abuse my scepter!

CHORUS LEADER: But for whatever things it is necessary to do with
 strength, we are arrayed in order;
 And for whatever things it is necessary to deliberate upon with judgment,
 all these are left up to you.

71. A traditional formula in treaties (cf. *Lysistrata* 168; Thucydides 4.18.3, 9).

HOOPOE: And now, by Zeus, it is no time for us to slumber any more,
 Nor for Nicias-delay,⁷²
 But action must be as swift as possible. But first,
 Come into my nest
 Among my wool-bits and twigs here,
 And tell us your names.

640

PEISTHETAIROS: But that's easy:
 My name is Peisthetairos; and this fellow here
 Is Euelpides of the Deme of Crioa.

HOOPOE: Well, welcome to you both!

PEISTHETAIROS: We accept your welcome.

HOOPOE: Come in here.

PEISTHETAIROS: Let's go . . . you lead us in.

HOOPOE: Come.

PEISTHETAIROS: Wait! Egad! Back water!
 Look here, explain to us two, how I and this fellow will
 Consort with you who are winged, when we are wingless?

650

HOOPOE: In a fine fashion.

PEISTHETAIROS: But look how, in the writings of Aesop,
 Something is said about a fox, as to how
 He once fared badly in a partnership with an eagle.⁷³

HOOPOE: There's nothing to be afraid of: for there is a certain root,
 Which if you chew will make you two winged.

PEISTHETAIROS: On this basis let's go in. Come, Xanthias
 And Manodorus: bring the baggage.

CHORUS LEADER: Hey you! I'm calling you, I say, you!

72. A word coined in reference to the delay Nicias as general advocated before, and exhibited during, the Sicilian expedition.

73. An eagle violated its friendship with a fox by helping its young to feed on the fox's cubs. Later, however, the eagle also suffers, for it ignites its nest with hot meat stolen from an altar; and the eaglets perish.

HOOPOE: What are you calling about?

CHORUS LEADER: You take these with you
To a good meal. But the sweet-voiced nightingale who sings with
the Muses,

660 Send out and leave with us, so that we can fool around with her!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, obey their request!
Send the little bird out from the flowering rush!

EUELPIDES: In the name of the gods, send her out here, so that
We two also may see the nightingale!

HOOPOE: But if that is what you two wish, it ought to be done.—Procne!
Come out and show yourself to the guests!

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh much-honored Zeus! How beautiful is the little bird!
How soft! How white!

EUELPIDES: Then do you know how much
I would enjoy spreading her thighs?

670 **PEISTHETAIROS:** How much gold she is wearing! Like a virgin!

EUELPIDES: I think I'd also like to kiss her!

PEISTHETAIROS: But you ill-starred fool, she has a beak like two spits!

EUELPIDES: But, by Zeus, you have to peel the shell from her head, like
an egg,
And then in that way kiss!

HOOPOE: Let's go!

PEISTHETAIROS: You lead us two, with good fortune.

[Peisthetairos, Euelpides, and Tereus exit into the latter's nest.]

CHORUS: Oh dear one, Oh tawny-throat!

Oh dearest of all birds,

Sharer in my songs,

Nightingale who is my fellow nursling!

680 You have come! You have come!—Displayed,
Bringing to me your sweet voice!

You, who elicit from the beautiful voice of
The flute the songs of spring—

Begin the anapests!

CHORUS LEADER: Come, ye men, who by nature live a life in darkness,⁷⁴
like to the race of leaves—

Accomplishing little, formed out of mud, tribes shadowy and feeble
in form,

Wingless creatures of a day, miserable mortal men resembling dreams!

Turn your mind to us immortals who exist forever:

The ethereal ones, who never grow old and who ponder deathlessly;

So that, after having heard a correct account from us of everything
concerning matters aloft,

690

Knowing correctly the nature of the birds, and the coming into being of
the gods, and of the rivers, and of Erebus⁷⁵ and Void,

You can tell Prodicus,⁷⁶ from me, to go hoot!

First, there was Void and Night and dark Erebus, and broad Tartarus,⁷⁷

But there was not Earth or Air or Heaven. In the limitless bosoms
of Erebus,

Night the dark-winged bore, at the very first, a wind-egg,

From which, as the seasons revolved, longing Eros,

His back glistening with golden wings, grew—like to windy vortices!

And he, mingling with winged, dark Void upon broad Tartarus

Hatched our race, and first drew it up into the light.

There was no prior race of immortals, before Eros mixed together
all things.

700

But, other things being mixed with others, there came into existence
Heaven, and Ocean,

And Earth, and the undying race of all the blessed gods. So, WE are

By far the oldest of all the blessed ones; and that we are of Eros,

Is evident from many things. For we fly, and we spend time with lovers.

And in the case of many beautiful boys, who have sworn against it
throughout the bloom of their youth,

74. Scholia suggest an alternative reading: “an ephemeral life.”

75. The personified underworld, born from Void [*Chaos*]⁷⁵—which was the primeval emptiness that at first “came into being” according to Hesiod (*Theogony* 116ff).

76. A preeminent sophist, contemporary with Socrates (see *Clouds* 361); he taught that gods were personifications of things beneficial to humans (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.118).

77. The personified region far beneath the Underworld; “broad Tartarus” is a Hesiodic formula: *Theogony* 868.

Male lovers have through our force spread their thighs—
 One giving the gift of a quail, another a porphyryon, another a goose,
 another a Persian bird.

And all the greatest things come to mortals through us birds!
 In the first place, we signal the seasons—spring, winter, and fall.

710 It's time to sow, when the whooping crane moves to Libya;⁷⁸
 And it announces, to the ship's captain, to hang up his oar and to go
 to bed,

And to Orestes,⁷⁹ to weave a cloak, so that he won't be chilled when he's
 stripping others!

And after this, the kite in turn appears to signal another season—
 The season to fleece the sheep; and then, the swallow:

When it is time to sell your cloak and buy something lighter.

And we are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, Phoebus Apollo.⁸⁰

For you go first to a bird, no matter what you turn to,

Whether it be trade, or acquisition of livelihood, or a man's marriage.

And you regard as a bird every matter that is decisively divinatory:⁸¹

720 An ominous statement is for you a bird, a sneeze you call a bird,
 A coincidence is a bird, a voice is a bird, a servant is a bird, an ass is
 a bird;

So, is it not manifest that we are for you Apollo's oracle?

If therefore you hold us to be gods,

You will have at your disposal Muses as prophets—

Breezes, seasons, winter, summer,

Heat that is within measure; and we won't run off

To sit solemnly above,

Beyond the clouds, as does Zeus;

Instead, remaining in your presence we will give to you—

730 To yourselves, to your children, to your children's children,
 Wealth in health, life, peace,

78. Announcing the coming winter; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 448–50.

79. Apparently a famous highwayman.

80. The sites of the most famous oracles.

81. The word for “bird” was also used for any omen, because birds were considered especially auspicious.

Youth, laughter, choruses, festivities,
And the milk of birds! The result will be that
So wealthy will you all become!

CHORUS: Woodland Muse—

Tio tio tio tio tio tio tiotinx!—
Versatile in song, with whom I,
In the vales and on the peaks of the mountains—
Tio tio tiotinx!—
Perch upon the leafy headed ash—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
Singing through my trilling throat,
Bringing forth sacred songs for Pan,
And solemn choral dances for the mountain Mother⁸²—
Totototototototix—
From where, like the honeybee,
Phrynicus⁸³ consumed the fruit
Of ambrosial tunes, always
Bearing his own sweet song—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!

740

750

CHORUS LEADER: If someone among you, Oh spectators, wishes with
the birds

To weave the rest of life in pleasure—let him come to us!
For as many things as are around here repressed, as being shameful by
lawful convention,
All these things are, among us birds, noble!
For if around here it is shameful by lawful convention to beat one's father,
This very thing is here noble among us—if someone, running at
his father,
Should strike him, saying, "Raise your spur, if you want to fight!"
And, if one of you should happen to be branded on the forehead as a
runaway slave,

760

82. Probably Cybele, a mother-nature goddess whose cult entered Athens from Asia Minor during the Persian wars.

83. An early tragedian whose beautiful songs remained popular especially among the older generation (*Wasps* 220, 268–69, 1490; *Frogs* 910, 1300).

This one shall be called a spotted francolin bird among us!
 And if someone should happen to be a Phrygian no less than Spintharos,
 Here he may be a Phrygian linnet-bird, of the family of Philemon!⁸⁴
 And if he is a slave and a Carian like Excecestides,⁸⁵
 Let him puff up grandfathers among us, and they will appear as
 fellow tribesmen!

And if the son of Peisius wishes to betray the gates to dishonored men,
 Let him become a partridge, a chick of his father!—
 Since among us there is nothing shameful in partridge-flight.
 Such things the swans—

770 Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
 With mingled cry, and in unison
 Beating wings, shouted to Apollo—
 Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
 Sitting on the bank by the Hebrus River.⁸⁶—
 Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
 And through the ethereal cloud went the cry,
 And the varied tribes of wild beasts quaked in fear,
 And the windless ether quelled the waves—
 Tototototototototinx!—
 780 And all Olympus rang!
 And astonishment seized the leaders;
 And the Olympian Graces,⁸⁷
 Together with the Muses, took up the tune—
 Tio tio tio tiotinx!

CHORUS LEADER: Nothing is better or more pleasant than to grow wings!
 If one of you spectators were winged,
 When he was hungry and irritated at the tragic choruses,
 He could take flight and go home for a meal;
 And then, being filled, he could fly back to us here again!

84. The joke is unclear.

85. The Carian slave who became an Athenian citizen, mentioned at 11 and 1527.

86. Probably an echo of a famous paeon by Alcaeus describing Apollo's flight from the Hyperboreans to Delphi in a swan-drawn chariot.

87. The Graces were daughters of Zeus and attendants of Aphrodite. Hesiod, *Theogony* 907–11.

And if some Patrocleides⁸⁸ among you happened to be shitting,
 He wouldn't ooze in his cloak, but would fly up,
 And having farted and caught his second wind, fly back again!
 And if one of you happens to be an adulterer,
 And sees the husband of the woman in the Council seats,⁸⁹
 He could spread his wings and fly up away from you,
 And then, having fucked, could fly back here again!
 So: isn't it worth everything to become winged?
 Dietrephes⁹⁰ at least, having only flask wings,
 Was elected Tribe-commander, and then cavalry commander, and then,
 from nothing,

790

He did great things; and is now a twittering cock-horse!⁹¹

800

[Peisthetairos and Euelpides reemerge, with wings.]

PEISTHETAIROS: So be it. —By Zeus, I have never
 Seen a more ridiculous affair!

EUELPIDES: What are you laughing at?

PEISTHETAIROS: At your wings!
 You know what you most resemble in those wings?
 A cheap painting of a gander!

EUELPIDES: And you, a blackbird plucked like a bowl-head!⁹²

PEISTHETAIROS: In this way we make comparisons illustrating the line
 of Aeschylus—
 “Not by others’ but by our own plumes.”⁹³

CHORUS LEADER: Come, what are we to do?

88. A political leader known for his flatulence, according to the scholia.

89. A block of seats in the front was reserved for members of the Council (cf. *Peace* 887, 906).

90. According to the scholia, Dietriphes became rich selling wine flasks, the wicker handles of which were called “wings”; he is mentioned in Thucydides (7.29–30, 8.64) as a commander and an oligarch.

91. The “cock-horse” was a mythic winged creature, used to characterize pompous leaders also at *Peace* 1177.

92. Peisthetairos is evidently bald; in the *Clouds* and *Peace*, Aristophanes makes fun of his own baldness.

93. A famous line from Aeschylus’s lost tragedy *Myrmidons* which became proverbial as an expression meaning “the eagle shot by an arrow of eagle feathers,” apparently like the English “hoisted by his own petard.”

PEISTHETAIROS: First, for the city

810 Establish some great and glorious name; then,
After this, sacrifice to the gods.

EUELPIDES: These things meet also with my approval.

PEISTHETAIROS: Look here, what will be our name for the city?
Do you wish one that is great, and shall we not call it by
The Lacedaimonian name of Sparta?

EUELPIDES: Heracles!—Me, establish *Sparta* as the name of MY city?!
Not for my bedstead, even if I had the mattress!⁹⁴

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, what name shall we establish for it?

EUELPIDES: From the clouds here and the regions aloft,
Something gaping.

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you want “Cloudcuckooia?”

HOOPOE: Hey! Wow!

820 You have invented a simply beautiful and great name!

EUELPIDES: Then is this Cloudcuckooia itself,
Where there is the great wealth of Theogenes,
And everything belonging to Aeschines?⁹⁵

PEISTHETAIROS: And it is best that
This be the plain of Phlegra,⁹⁶ where the gods
Outshot in boastfulness the Earthborn [Giants].

HOOPOE: Shining is this affair of the city! So what god will be
The guardian of the citadel? For whom shall we weave the Peplos?⁹⁷

EUELPIDES: Why not let it be Athena, Guardian of the city?

PEISTHETAIROS: And how would a city ever become well ordered,
830 Where the god is a woman, who
Stands fully armed, while Cleisthenes⁹⁸ holds the spindle?

94. The word “sparta” meant also the cords used to support the mattress of a bed.

95. Two notorious boasters about their vague or cloudy wealth; see below 1127 and *Wasps* 324, 459, 1243.

96. Where the rebellion of the Giants was crushed by the Olympians led by Zeus.

97. An embroidered robe offered at the great festival to Athena.

98. A notorious effeminate.

EUELPIDES: So who will hold the Stork Wall⁹⁹ of the city?

HOOPOE: A bird from our Persian breed,
Who is everywhere said to be the most fierce
Offspring of Ares.

EUELPIDES: O master offspring!
How the god is suited to dwell on the rocks!

PEISTHETAIROS: Come now, you go up in the air
And serve to help the builders—
Bring rubble, strip and mix clay,
Carry up the hod, fall off the ladder,
Set up guards, keep the fire always banked,
Make the rounds bearing the alarm bell, and sleep there.
And send a herald up to the gods,
And another herald down to the humans,
And from there back to me.

840

EUELPIDES: And you, staying here,
Can go hang!

PEISTHETAIROS: Good fellow, go where I send you!
For nothing of what I say will be accomplished without you!
[Exit Euelpides.]
And I, so that I may sacrifice to the new gods,
Shall summon the priest to conduct the sacrifices.
Boy! Boy! Take the basket and the basin.

850

CHORUS: I row with you,¹⁰⁰ I agree with you,
I join in approving
The approach to the gods with great and solemn songs,
And moreover at the same time the sacrifice of some lamb, to curry favor.
Go! Go! Shout the Pythian cry to the god!
And let Chaeris¹⁰¹ accompany the song!

99. The "Pelargicon," the ancient wall around the acropolis in Athens.

100. According to the scholia, these lines are modeled on a chorus in Sophocles' lost *Peleus*.

101. A notoriously bad flute player, who used to show up and play uninvited (see *Acharnians* 16, 866; *Peace* 951).

PEISTHETAIROS: You! Cease that puffing! —Heracles! What is this?

860 By Zeus, I've seen many awful things, but this!¹⁰²
I've never yet seen a mouth-band-wearing¹⁰³ crow!

[Enter a priest, with a sacrificed goat.]

PEISTHETAIROS: Priest, it's your job: sacrifice to the new gods!

PRIEST: I will do these things. But where is the one who has the basket?

Let us pray; to Hestia¹⁰⁴—of the birds, and to the Kite who keeps
the Hearth,

And to all the Olympian Birds and all the Olympian Birdesses . . .

870 **PEISTHETAIROS:** Hail Sounium Hawk, Sea-stork Lord!¹⁰⁵

PRIEST: And to the Pythian and the Delian Swan, and to the
Quail-mother Leto, and to Artemis the Goldfinch . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: No longer Colainis,¹⁰⁶ but Goldfinch!

PRIEST: And to Sabazius¹⁰⁷ the Finch, and to the Great Ostrich
Mother of gods and of humans . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Mistress Cybele, the ostrich mother of Cleocritus!¹⁰⁸

PRIEST: Grant health and salvation to these Cloudcuckooians—and also to
the Chians . . .

880 **PEISTHETAIROS:** It delights me to have the Chians always tacked on!¹⁰⁹

PRIEST: And to the birds who are heroes and children of heroes—to the
Porphyrion and the White Pelican and the Grey Pelican and the Red
Hawk and the Grouse and the Peacock and the Sedge Warbler and the

102. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

103. A leather muzzle used by flute players to modulate the flow of breathing.

104. The goddess of the hearth, center of household worship and also of the civic worship at the communal hearth.

105. Sounium is the cape south of Athens where stands a famous temple to Poseidon; the hawk is here saluted as replacing Poseidon, and in what follows various birds supplant the traditional divinities.

106. A traditional epithet for Artemis.

107. A Phrygian god, worshipped by the Greeks as Bacchus.

108. A fat fellow notorious for resembling an ostrich: *Frogs* 1437.

109. At official prayers, the Athenians always invoked blessing also for the Chians, who were the only subject-allies who had never revolted against them.

Teal and the Harrier and the Heron and the Gannet and the Black Tit
and the Titmouse and . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Stop! Go to the crows! Stop calling! Egad!
To what sacred victim, you ill-starred fool, are you calling
Vultures and Sea-eagles!? Don't you see, that
One single kite would snatch and fly away with the meat?!
Get away from us, you with your garlands!
For I by myself alone shall perform this sacrifice!

890

[Priest exits, leaving the goat.]

CHORUS: Once again, then, for you
Must I raise a second pious and reverent song
For the ablution, and invoke
The Blessed Ones—or rather some one alone,
If you have even enough meat offering for that!
For the offerings here are nothing but
A [goat's] beard and horns!

900

PEISTHETAIROS: As we sacrifice we shall pray to the winged gods.

POET [entering]: Cloudcuckooia the Happy!
Salute Her, Oh Muse, in singing hymns!¹¹⁰

PEISTHETAIROS: Where did this come from?! Tell me, WHO are you?

POET: I, giving forth song of “honey-tongued” lyrics,
Am a “nimble servant” of the Muses,
As Homer says.¹¹¹

910

PEISTHETAIROS: A slave, but you wear your hair that long?!¹¹²

POET: No! Rather, WE are all the EDUCATORS—
And *thus* “nimble servants of the Muses,”
As Homer says.

PEISTHETAIROS: Surely that is why you are wearing such a “nimble,” cheap,
little cloak!
Look, poet, why have you come here—for your ruin?

110. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

111. *Iliad* 1.249 has the phrase “honey tongued” and 1.321 “nimble servant.”

112. Only free men wore their hair long.

POET: Because I have made for your Cloudcuckooia
 Many beautiful dithyrambs,
 And songs for maiden choruses, and also in the manner of Simonides!¹¹³

920 **PEISTHETAIROS:** When did you write this poetry? Starting when?

POET: From of old! From of old do I celebrate this city!

PEISTHETAIROS: Didn't I just make the tenth-day sacrifice,
 And just now give the name, as to a baby?

POET: But the word of the Muses is fleet,
 Like the sparkle of horses!
 But you, "founding father of Aetna,
 Synonymous with the very divine temples,"¹¹⁴
 Give to me whatever
 With a nod of your head you will,
 930 Giving of thine to me!

PEISTHETAIROS: (This fellow is going to give us troubles,
 If we don't escape this fellow's clutches by giving him something!)
 You there, who have a leather jacket over an under-cloak!
 Take it off and give it to this wise poet! . . .
 Here, you can have the leather jacket;
 You seem altogether chilly to me.

POET: This with not unwilling affection
 The Muse accepts as her gift.
 Now you may learn with your mind a little word of Pindar's.

940 **PEISTHETAIROS:** (This fellow is not going to depart from us!)

POET: "For among the Scythian nomads,
 Wanders, away from the hosts, he
 Who of a woven cloak is not possessed;

113. A poet famous for his love of money.

114. According to the scholia, this is a quotation from a (lost) poem of Pindar (fragment 105) in honor of the Syracusan tyrant Hiero, who had refounded Catana in Sicily under the name "Aetna."

Inglorious he goes in a leather jacket without underwear!"¹¹⁵
 Cogitate upon what I am saying.

PEISTHETAIROS: (I cogitate that he wants to take the underwear!)
 Okay you, Strip! For one must help the poet!
 —Now take this and go!

POET: I depart;
 And to the city, after I depart, I shall make the following poetry:
 "Celebrate, Oh golden-throned one,"¹¹⁶
 The shivering and icy place!
 To the snow-struck plain of numerous paths
 I came: La-la-la!"

950

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus! You have surely escaped these
 Shivers by taking that underwear! . . .
 By Zeus, I never expected this evil—
 That so quickly this fellow would learn about the city!
 You! Go around once again taking the basin for ablutions!
 Let auspicious speech be observed!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: *Do not start the sacrifice of the goat!*

PEISTHETAIROS: And who are YOU?

960

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Who? A collector of oracles!

PEISTHETAIROS: Go hang!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Oh you daimonic one! Do not treat vulgarly the
 divine things!

For there is an oracle of Bacis¹¹⁷ that speaks plainly
 About the Cloudcuckooians!

PEISTHETAIROS: So then how come you did not report this oracle before I
 Founded this city?

115. Another comically altered quotation from the proceeding poem of Pindar, with which the poet asked for a chariot, to go with mules that the tyrant had already given as a gift.

116. Pindar speaks of the "golden-throned Muse": *Pythian Odes* 4.464; *Nemian Odes* 1.57.

117. An ancient Boeotian prophet, whose prophecies were compiled in books and enjoyed wide respect during the Peloponnesian War. Cf. *Knights* 123–24, 1003–4; *Peace* 1070.

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: The divine within prevented me.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, there's nothing like hearing the verses!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: "But when wolves and hoary crows will dwell in the same spot betwixt Corinth and Sicyon . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: What in the world concerning Corinth pertains to ME?!

970 **ORACLE-COLLECTOR:** Bacis utters this as a riddle in regard to the air!

"First, to Pandora¹¹⁸ sacrifice a white-haired lamb;
And he who shall come as the first prophetic expounder of my words,
To him give a clean cloak and new sandals . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: *Sandals* are in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!

"And give also a cup, and fill his hands with the entrails! . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: And giving the *entrails* is in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!

"And, if, Oh divinely inspired youth, thou shalt do as I command,
Thou shalt become an eagle in the clouds! But, if thou givest not,
Thou shalt become neither dove nor eagle nor oak-woodpecker! . . ."

980 **PEISTHETAIROS:** These things too are in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, the oracle is not at all the same as this one,
Which I took down as dictation from Apollo!—

"Now if ever an uninvited boasting human should arrive,
Troubling the sacrifices and desiring the entrails,
Then indeed one must beat him in the middle of his ribs . . ."
[Striking the oracle-collector]

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: I think you are talking nonsense!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, take the book!

"And spare nothing, not even if he be an eagle in the clouds,
Or Lampon, or even the great Diopeithes!"¹¹⁹

118. An earth-goddess, whose name means "Giver of all gifts."

119. Well-known soothsayers: for Lampon, see 521 and *Clouds* 332; for Diopeithes (a prosecutor of atheists), *Knights* 1085 and *Wasps* 580.

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: These things are in there?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, take the book!

Won't you exit? —to the crows!

990

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Woe is me! I *am* a coward!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not run off, to deliver oracles elsewhere!?

METON¹²⁰: I come among you . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: YET ANOTHER foul fellow here!

So what are YOU doing? What's your form of project?

What's the conceit, what's afoot?

METON: I wish to measure the air geometrically

For you, and measure it out in proportion to the earth.

PEISTHETAIROS: In the name of the gods!

Who ARE you among men?

METON: Who am I?

I'm *Meton*! Whom Hellas and Colonus know!¹²¹

PEISTHETAIROS: Tell me,

What are these things of yours?

METON: Air-measurers.

For air is in its form as a whole

1000

Very much like an oven.¹²² So I apply

The measuring ruler, and from above I insert this bent

Compass¹²³—you do understand?

PEISTHETAIROS: I do NOT understand!

METON: I shall measure by applying the straight measuring stick, so that

The circle will become for you squared, and in the middle

120. A famous scientist, astronomer, and mathematician; his proposed reform of the calendar may be referred to by the chorus of *Clouds* in *Clouds* 615.

121. Meton had recently erected a water clock in a part of Athens named Colonus.

122. The same analogy is ascribed to Socrates and his followers by Strepsiades in *Clouds* 96, except that Strepsiades supposes that the doctrine is that the air is literally a stove.

123. The "bent compass" appears in *Clouds* 178 as the instrument which Socrates is reported by his student to have been pretending to use to lay out a geometric problem while actually using it to snare and filch a cloak to pay for supper.

Will be the agora, with roads leading straight into
 The middle of it—even as from a star,
 Itself being circular, in every direction
 Shine forth straight rays.

PEISTHETAIROS: This human is a Thales!¹²⁴ —Meton!

1010 **METON:** What is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: You know how much I love you;
 So, be persuaded by me, and slip away down the road.

METON: What's so terrible a danger?

PEISTHETAIROS: As in Sparta,
 Certain people are driven out as strangers;¹²⁵
 There are many beatings throughout the city.

METON: So you have civil strife?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, no indeed!

METON: Well then what?

PEISTHETAIROS: It is agreed by all, united in spirit, to crush all boasters.

METON: Then I should be on my way!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, I don't know whether
 You'll be quick enough! For they have come very near!

METON: Alas! I am ill starred!

PEISTHETAIROS: Did I not long ago warn you?

1020 Won't you go away and measure yourself?!

INSPECTOR: Where are the consuls?

PEISTHETAIROS: Who's THIS Sardanapalus?¹²⁶

INSPECTOR: I come hither as Inspector, having been chosen by the lot,
 To the Cloudcuckooians.

PEISTHETAIROS: Inspector?!
 Who sent you here?

124. Thales is renowned as the first recorded philosopher. In *Clouds* 180 Strepsiades, having heard of Socrates' feat with the bent compass, asks, "So why do we wonder at Thales?"

125. Sparta kept aliens out to prevent corruption of the citizenry.

126. The proverbially luxurious last king of Assyria.

INSPECTOR: A paltry bill of Teleas.¹²⁷

PEISTHETAIROS: What?! Look, do you want to get paid,
And go away without having trouble?

INSPECTOR: Yes, by the gods! I need to be busy in the Assembly at
home, anyway.

For I have to do business for Pharnaces.¹²⁸

PEISTHETAIROS: Take it and leave: here's the payoff [striking him]!

INSPECTOR: What's this?!

1030

PEISTHETAIROS: It's an Assembly about that Pharnaces!

INSPECTOR: I call to witness that I, an Inspector, am being beaten!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not get out? Will you not take away your twin
voting urns?¹²⁹

[Inspector exits.]

—Isn't this terrible? They're sending inspectors
To the city, before the gods have had their sacrifices!

SELLER OF DECREES: "*and if the Cloudcuckooians do injustice to an
Athenian . . .*"

PEISTHETAIROS: Now what evil is THIS—this scroll?!

SELLER OF DECREES: A seller of decrees am I, and new laws
I come hither to sell to you!

PEISTHETAIROS: With regard to WHAT?!

SELLER OF DECREES: "*Cloudcuckooia is to employ the same
measurements and*

1040

Weights and decrees as the Olophyxians."¹³⁰

PEISTHETAIROS: And you will soon have to use the same as the Ototyxians!

SELLER OF DECREES: Look fellow, what is your problem?

127. See note 25.

128. A Persian satrap or proconsul (the implication is of treasonous dealings with the Persians, inveterate enemies of the Greeks).

129. The Athenian inspector has brought the equipment for democratic politics.

130. The city Olophyxus has a name that sounds like the Greek word for "lament," *ototozein*, upon which the pun is made in the following line.

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not take away your laws?!
 Bitter are the laws I shall show you today!

[Inspector re-enters.]

INSPECTOR: I summon Peisthetairos
 On a charge of hubris,
 To appear in the month of Munychion!¹³¹

PEISTHETAIROS: Are you for real? Are you *still* here!?

1050 **SELLER OF DECREES:** *"If someone should drive out the officials and not
 receive them
 In accordance with the treaty . . ."*

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad, am I ill starred! Are YOU still here too?

INSPECTOR: I'll destroy you and I'll indict you for a penalty of ten thousand
 drachmas!

PEISTHETAIROS: And I'll smash your twin voting urns!

[Inspector exits, on the run.]

SELLER OF DECREES: Do you remember those evenings when you used to
 crap on the monument?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad! Someone seize him! [Seller of Decrees flees.] So, you
 aren't staying?

Let's get away from here as quickly as possible,
 And go inside in order to sacrifice the goat to the gods.

[Exit Peisthetairos and slaves with goat.]

CHORUS: Now it is to Me, the All-seeing
 And All-ruling, that all mortals
 1060 Will sacrifice with votive prayers.
 For I watch over the entire earth,
 And I preserve the blooming crops
 By killing the breed of many tribes
 Of wild beasts, who with omnivorous jaws
 Devour everything on earth that grows from the pod
 And the fruit on the branches on which they sit;

131. Roughly, April, when lawsuits involving non-Athenians were heard.

And I kill those who the fragrant fruits
 Destroy with most hateful pollutions—
 Snakes and biting insects, all
 Perish in deaths beneath my wing!

1070

CHORUS LEADER: On this very day it was announced,
 That if any one of you slays Diagoras the Melian,¹³²
 He will receive as reward a talent; and if someone slays one of
 The dead tyrants,¹³³ he will receive a talent!¹³⁴
 Now, it is our wish that here also we proclaim the very same things.
 If any one of you slays Philocrates the Sparrovian,¹³⁵
 Let him take a talent, and if he captures him living, four!
 For he strings up finches and sells them for seven obols;
 And then, having inflated the thrushes, he displays them and does
 outrage upon them;
 He sticks feathers up the noses of the blackbirds;
 He similarly holds captive pigeons that he has taken,
 Whom he compels to serve as decoys bound in a net!
 These things we wish to announce; and if someone among you
 Is raising birds that he keeps in the courtyard, we charge him to let
 them go!
 And if you do not obey, you will be captured by the birds
 And in turn *you* will be bound as decoys by *us*!

1080

CHORUS: Happy race of winged
 Birds, who in winter
 Do not clothe themselves in wool!
 Nor again in the stifling heat does
 The far-flashing ray heat us:
 But I dwell in the bosoms of
 Flowery, leafy meadows
 When the divine sharp song of the grasshopper,

1090

132. See 186.

133. The last tyrant of Athens was expelled in 510 B.C., but the fear of tyrants was constantly whipped up by demagogues.

134. A substantial measure of money.

135. See 14.

Crazed by the sun, shouts out in the noonday heat!

And I winter in hollow caves

Playing with mountain Nymphs!

And in spring we feed on virgin

1100 White young myrtle and the garden herbs of the Graces!¹³⁶

To the judges we wish to say something about the victory:

How many good things we will give to all of them, if they judge for us,

So that they will get greater gifts by far than from those of Alexander.¹³⁷

For in the first place, what every judge especially aims for—

You will never lack Laureian owls;¹³⁸

But they'll dwell with you, and in your purses

Build nests, where they will hatch little coins!

And then in addition, you will dwell as if in temples:

1110 For we will roof your homes with gables that look like eagles!

And if you obtain a little office and wish to engage in a bit of corruption,

We'll put a sharp little hawk in your hands!

And if you are dining somewhere, we'll send you some bird gizzards!

BUT: if you do NOT judge us first, then build bronze moon-shaped
shields to carry

As if you were statues!¹³⁹ For whoever of you doesn't have a "moon,"

Then, when you are wearing a white dress cloak especially, you will

Pay the just punishment through us, being crapped on by all the birds!

PEISTHETAIROS: The divine omens are all fine for us, Oh birds!

But no messenger has come from the wall,

1120 From whom we might learn about affairs there.

But here comes running one with Alphan panting!¹⁴⁰

FIRST MESSENGER: Where, where is he? Where, where, where is he?

Where, where, where is he? Oh where,

Where, is Peisthetairos the ruler?

136. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

137. A name of Paris, who was offered gifts by the goddesses among whom he was asked to judge a beauty contest.

138. The coins of Athens, from silver mined at Laureium and stamped with the figure of an owl, the bird sacred to Athena.

139. The scholia says that little cups were put over statues to protect them from bird droppings.

140. I.e., like someone running in the Olympics. (The Alpheus river flows to Olympia.)

PEISTHETAIROS: Here!

FIRST MESSENGER: Your wall has been built!

PEISTHETAIROS: You speak well!

FIRST MESSENGER: A most beautiful and most magnificent work!
Such in width that Proxenides of the loud-mouth district
And Theogenes¹⁴¹ could with two chariots
Drawn by horses as big as the Trojan,
Pass one another!

PEISTHETAIROS: Heracles! \

FIRST MESSENGER: And the height, since I measured it myself,
Is one hundred spans!¹⁴²

1130

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh Poseidon, how great!
Who built it so big?

FIRST MESSENGER: Birds, no one else: not an Egyptian
Bricklayer, not a stonemason, not a carpenter was present;
But with their own hands, so that it amazed me.
For from Libya there came about thirty thousand
Cranes, having swallowed foundation stones.¹⁴³
These the crakes fashioned with their beaks.
Ten thousand other storks carried the bricks up;
And water the lapwings and other water birds
Carried from below up into the air.

1140

PEISTHETAIROS: Who carried the mortar up to them?

FIRST MESSENGER: Herons, in hods.

PEISTHETAIROS: How did they pour the mortar in?

FIRST MESSENGER: This, my good fellow, was devised in the wisest fashion!
The geese, digging down as if with shovels,
Got it into the hods for them with their feet!

PEISTHETAIROS: What, indeed, would feet not accomplish!?¹⁴⁴

141. See 822.

142. A span was the length of the outstretched arms, or about six feet.

143. Cranes were believed to swallow stones for ballast when flying; see also 1429.

144. The proverb was, "What indeed would hands not accomplish?"

FIRST MESSENGER: And, by Zeus, the ducks carried
 The bricks in girdles around the waist!
 1150 And the swallows flew up carrying the trowel
 Behind, even as a child carries the mud against his stomach!

PEISTHETAIROS: Why indeed would anyone pay hired workers still?
 Come, look: what about this: who fashioned the wooden beams for
 The wall?

FIRST MESSENGER: Birds were the carpenters:
 Most wise woodpeckers, who with their beaks
 Pecked the gates. And there was a noise
 While they were hewing as in a shipyard.
 Now everything is gated with gates,
 And fastened and guarded in a circle,
 1160 The rounds are being made, the alarm bell carried, everywhere
 Guards are established and watch-fires
 In towers. But I'm running off
 To wash up. You yourself do the other things now.

CHORUS LEADER: Look here, what are you doing? Are you astounded that
 The wall has thus been built so swiftly?

PEISTHETAIROS: I am, by the gods! And I deserve to be!
 For it truly appears to me to be equivalent to lies!
 But here is a guard as messenger from the ones there
 Running toward us looking like a war-dancer!

1170 **SECOND MESSENGER:** Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi!

PEISTHETAIROS What's the matter?

SECOND MESSENGER: We have suffered the most terrible things!
 For one of the gods from Zeus has just
 Flown through the gates into the air,
 Escaping the notice of the jackdaw day-sentinels!

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh what a terrible deed, and what a scoundrel to have
 done it!
 Which of the gods was it?

SECOND MESSENGER: We don't know; but that it had wings,
 This we know.

PEISTHETAIROS: Should you not have sent the city guards after him
In hot pursuit?

SECOND MESSENGER: But we did send
Thirty thousand falcons as mounted archers,
And every one went with talons curved,
Hawk, buzzard, vulture, owl, eagle!
With the rush and the wings and the whirring
The ether vibrates as the god is sought!
And the god's not far away, but already somewhere around here,
Presumably.

1180

PEISTHETAIROS: Then we should take up slings
And bows! Every servant run hither!
Take up the bow! Strike! Someone give me a sling!

CHORUS: War is raised! An unspeakable war
Between me and the gods!
But guard the entire
Cloud-wrapped air,
That Erebus bore,
Lest some god
Escape your notice going by here!
Everyone gather in a circle looking out,
Because nearby is audible the sound
Of the winged whir of some divinity aloft!

1190

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, you! Where, where, where are you flying to?
Stay calm,
Hold, unflinching! Stand here! Hold back from running!
. . . Who are you? From where? You must say where in the world
you're from!

1200

IRIS¹⁴⁵: *I am from the Olympian Gods!*

PEISTHETAIROS: Your name: what is it? Sail or head?¹⁴⁶

145. The messenger-goddess Rainbow, daughter of Wonder and Electra. Winged, she dressed in thin silk that in sunlight had all the colors seen in the rainbow.

146. The question is apparently prompted by her appearance onstage—her dress and wings look like sails, and her headdress is equally striking.

IRIS: Iris the swift!

PEISTHETAIROS: The Paralus or the Salaminia?¹⁴⁷

IRIS: What's that?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Why doesn't some three-balled buzzard fly up and grab her?

IRIS: Seize ME?!—
What in the world is this evil?

PEISTHETAIROS: You'll suffer in a big way!

IRIS: This is a very strange business!

PEISTHETAIROS: Through which gates
Did you get in through the wall, you most vile one?

1210 IRIS: By Zeus, *I* do not know which gates!

PEISTHETAIROS: You hear how ironic she's being?
Did you go after the jackdaw sentinels?—Aren't you going to say?
Do you have a pass from the storks?

IRIS: What is this evil?!

PEISTHETAIROS: So you didn't get one!?

IRIS: Are you sane?

PEISTHETAIROS: Nor did any bird official stick on you a pass-badge?

IRIS: By Zeus, fellow, no one stuck anything on ME!

PEISTHETAIROS: Aha! So then you flew silently
Through a foreign city and the void?

IRIS: For in what other way *should* the GODS fly?!

1220 PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, I don't know; but not in *THIS* way!
You are now committing injustice. SO: do you know this, that
It would be most just for you, of all Irises, being caught,
To die—if you got what you deserve?

IRIS: But I'm deathless!

PEISTHETAIROS: But all the same, you are to die.

147. The two swiftest Athenian ships, sent out on special missions.

For we'll be undergoing terrible things, in my opinion,
 If we rule over the others, but if you gods
 Are unrestrained, and still do not know that
 You must pay heed in your turn to the stronger!
 But tell me, where are you navigating to with those wings?

IRIS: I? I fly to human beings from the Father,
 Announcing that they are to sacrifice to the Olympian gods
 With sheep-slaughter on sacrificial hearths
 Filling the street with savor.

1230

PEISTHETAIROS: What are you saying? —To WHICH gods?

IRIS: WHICH? . . . US! The gods in heaven!

PEISTHETAIROS: YOU are gods?!

IRIS: For who ELSE is a god?

PEISTHETAIROS: The birds are now gods for humans,
 And sacrifice is to be made to them; but, by Zeus! NOT to Zeus!

IRIS: You fool! You fool!—do not stir up the awful thoughts of gods,
 Lest Justice wreak destruction upon your entire race
 With the spade of Zeus,
 And by fire, your body, and the enfolding walls of your house,
 Incinerate with Licymnian bolts!¹⁴⁸

1240

PEISTHETAIROS: Listen, you! Cease these bombastic sputterings!
 (And you there: stand fast without trembling!)—Now, look here:
 Do you think I'm a Lydian, or a Phrygian,¹⁴⁹ whom you are going to
 spook by talking this way?
 Don't you know that if Zeus gives me too much grief,
 His roof and halls of Amphion¹⁵⁰
 I shall incinerate, using fire-bearing eagles?!
 And I shall send into heaven against him porphyry birds
 Clad in leopard skins,

1250

148. The *Licymnius* is a lost tragedy of Euripides; the phraseology here is taken from tragedy.

149. Civilized non-Greek or "barbarian" peoples in the Persian empire; the phrase is from Euripides' *Alcestis* 675.

150. Spoofing a line from the lost *Niobe* of Aeschylus.

More than six hundred in number! —And indeed there was an occasion
 When a single Porphyryon gave him trouble!¹⁵¹
 And you: if you give me grief in some way, I'll spread
 The thighs of His chief serving girl, and screw
 This Iris here, so that you'll be astonished
 How, though I am an old man, I can show an erection as big as three
 ships' prows!

IRIS: May you be split, fellow, for these utterances!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not scat?! Quickly! . . . Shoo! Shoo!

IRIS: MY FATHER will put a stop to your hybris!

1260 **PEISTHETAIROS:** Alas! Alas! —Won't you please fly somewhere else
 And "incinerate"¹⁵² one of the younger fellows?

[Exit Iris.]

CHORUS: We have shut out the Zeus-born gods
 From ever again passing through my city,
 Nor ever again shall there be sent through here, from mortals on
 the plain,
 Some smoke dedicated to the gods!

PEISTHETAIROS: It is frightening, if the herald who
 Went to the mortals
 1270 Will never again return home.

HERALD: Oh Peisthetairos! Oh blessed one! Oh wisest one!
 Oh most glorious one! Oh wisest one! Oh most subtle one!
 Oh thrice blessed! Oh (—give the cue!)¹⁵³

PEISTHETAIROS: What are you saying?

HERALD: With this golden crown, on account of your wisdom,
 All the peoples crown and honor you!

PEISTHETAIROS: I accept. But why do the peoples honor thus me?

151. Porphyryon was a leader of the Giants who warred with the Olympians led by Zeus. See 553.

152. With an obscene double entendre.

153. The actor playing the Herald here comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

HERALD: Oh you who founded the most glorious ethereal city,
 Don't you know how much honor you have from humans,
 How many passionate lovers you have of this land!
 For before you founded this city,
 All humans had become, at that time, crazed with Spartan ways:
 They wore long hair, they starved themselves, they lived in filth,
 they Socratized,
 They carried Spartan message-scrolls around; but now, revolutionizing,
 They learn to be birds, and do everything for the sake of pleasure—
 In which they imitate the birds!
 In the first place, together they all from bed straightway
 Fly at dawn, as we do, up to the law/pasture;¹⁵⁴
 And then together they brood upon archival books;
 And then graze upon decrees.
 They have become so manifestly bird-crazed that
 Many have been given birds' names.
 "Partridge" one lame merchant is named,
 And Menippus¹⁵⁵ is called "Swallow,"
 Opuntius¹⁵⁶ "One-eyed Raven,"
 Philocles¹⁵⁷ "Crested Lark," Theogenes¹⁵⁸ "Sheldrake,"
 Lycurgus "Ibis," Chaerephon¹⁵⁹ "Vampire-bat,"
 Syracosius¹⁶⁰ "Jay." And Meidias is there
 Called "Quail"—for he is like a quail
 Flipped on its head by a quail-flipper.¹⁶¹

1280

1290

154. A play on the word *nomos*, which means both "pasture" and "law."

155. A horse-breeder and blacksmith: the word for the hollow of a horse's foot sounded like the word for "swallow."

156. An obnoxious, one-eyed informer: see 153.

157. See 281.

158. See 822.

159. The student and associate of Socrates in the *Clouds*; see also *Wasps* 1408. He is likened to a bat apparently because of his gaunt, death-like appearance.

160. An orator ridiculed for his croaking speech who, according to the scholia, got a decree passed restraining the liberty of speech of comic poets and in particular outlawing reference in plays to citizens by their real names.

161. Referring to a curious sport of the time, in which a human contestant tried to make a quail back off using his finger.

1300 And on account of love of birds all are singing a song,
 In which some swallow is in the lyrics,
 Or a wild duck, or some goose, or a ring-dove,
 Or wings, or even some small part of a feather!
 So much about things down there. But one thing I tell you:
 There are coming here, from there, more than ten thousand
 In need of wings and taloned characteristics.
 So you have to get wings from somewhere for the arrivals!

PEISTHETAIROS: Then, by Zeus, our work can't be delayed!
 But, as quickly as possible, you run in and
 1310 Fill the crates and baskets with wings;
 Let Manes bring the wings to me at the gate;
 And I shall receive those who are coming for them.

[Manes the slave rushes off, soon returning with baskets; during the following lines he is reviled and beaten intermittently.]

CHORUS: Soon "many-manned" is what
 This city will be called by a human!

PEISTHETAIROS: If only fortune is favorable!

CHORUS: Passionate lovers of my city are pouring in!

PEISTHETAIROS [to slaves]: I command you, move faster!

CHORUS: For what, that is noble for a real man,
 Does not dwell in this city?—

1320 Wisdom, Longing, the immortal Graces,
 And the cheerful countenance of kindly
 Tranquility!¹⁶²

PEISTHETAIROS [to slaves]: How slackly you serve!
 Can't you comply more quickly?

CHORUS: Someone quickly bring the basket of wings!
 You, goad them on!

PEISTHETAIROS: By beating this fellow, **THUS!**

CHORUS: Yes, for he's as slow as some donkey!

162. Wisdom, Longing, and Tranquility are personified deities.

PEISTHETAIROS: For Manes is an unmanly one.

CHORUS: And you, first

1330

Set out the wings in order, thus:

The musical ones together, and the prophetic, and

The seafaring. And next look to see that, in a prudent fashion,

You apply the wings to each man.

PEISTHETAIROS: By the kestrels! I'll not hold back anymore from you,

When I see you being so unmanly and slow!

[Beats Manes.] → going against what is established

A FATHER-BEATER: Would that I might become a high-flying eagle,

So that I might fly up over the swell

Of the barren, shining sea!¹⁶³

PEISTHETAIROS: It's likely that the messenger was not false in his message;

1340

For here comes someone singing of eagles.

FATHER-BEATER: Hey!

There is nothing sweeter than to be winged!

I am bird-crazy, and I fly and I wish

To dwell with you; and I desire *your* lawful conventions!

PEISTHETAIROS: Which lawful conventions?! For there are many lawful conventions of the birds.

FATHER-BEATER: All of 'em! But especially that it is conventionally held to be noble

Among birds to choke and bite one's father! → normal w/ birds, wants to join city so he can (be fit to be)

PEISTHETAIROS: Yes, by Zeus, he is lawfully held by us to be very manly,

Whoever as a chick has beaten his father!

1350

FATHER-BEATER: These are the reasons why I have emigrated hither,

Desiring to strangle my father, and to have everything!

PEISTHETAIROS: But there is an ancient lawful convention among us birds,

Inscribed on the tablets of the storks:

"When the father stork has

163. The language mixes Homeric and other famous poetic echoes, and is partly borrowed, according to the scholia, from the lost *Oenomaus* of Sophocles.

Nourished all the little storklings to the point where they are
Fledged, the offspring must in turn nourish the father."

FATHER-BEATER: Then much have I gained to enjoy, by Zeus, by
coming hither,
If my father's going to feed off me!!!

1360 **PEISTHETAIROS:** No matter: for since, fellow, you have come
Well disposed, I shall make you winged as if you were an orphan bird.¹⁶⁴
And you, young man, I shall not ill advise,
But I'll give you the very advice I learned when I was a boy; for you
Must not beat your father; taking this → ~~like this idea~~
Wing and this spur, each in one of your hands, ~~(and then you can fly)~~
Believe, in accordance with convention, that you have here this crest of
a rooster:
Stand guard, campaign as a soldier, support yourself as a mercenary,
Let your father live; but when you are in the mood for a fight,
Fly away to affairs in Thrace, and fight there!

1370 **FATHER-BEATER:** By Dionysus, in my opinion you speak well,¹⁶⁵
And I shall be persuaded by you!

PEISTHETAIROS: And then, by Zeus, you'll have intelligence!

KINESIAS¹⁶⁶ [singing]: I fly up toward Olympus on light wings!¹⁶⁷
And I fly a path of different melodies at different times—

PEISTHETAIROS: This business is in need of a weight of wings!

KINESIAS: —With fearless mind and body ascending the new path—

PEISTHETAIROS: We greet scrawny Kinesias!

Why have you circled in your circling dances with your lame foot hither?

1380 **KINESIAS** [sings]: I wish to become a bird, a clear-voiced nightingale.

164. In Athens, orphaned sons of citizens who died in battle were maintained in honor by the city.

165. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

166. A dithyrambic poet, unusually thin, involved in writing for certain characteristic sacred circle-dances of choruses in festivals.

167. Spoofing a line from the lyric poet Anacreon, according to the scholia.

PEISTHETAIROS: Stop singing, and *tell* me what you are saying!

KINESIAS: After having been made winged by you, I wish to fly aloft
And pluck from the Clouds new
Air-soaring and snow-beaten preludes!

PEISTHETAIROS: From the Clouds you would pluck preludes?

KINESIAS: Yes, for our art is derived from thence.¹⁶⁸

For the bright things in dithyrambs
Are airy and misty and darkly gleaming
And soaring on wings; but as you listen, you will soon know:

1390

PEISTHETAIROS: No! Not I!

KINESIAS: Yes, by Heracles, you!
For you, I shall go through EVERYTHING about air:
[Singing] Images of winged,
Ether-treading,
Slender-necked birds!—

PEISTHETAIROS: Whoa!

KINESIAS: —Bounding along the saltwater path,
I would go on the streams of the winds!—

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, *I* shall stop your wind! [Lunges for him.]

KINESIAS [eluding Peisthetairos]:—At times striking off on a southern path,
At times, again, northward my body bending,
Cutting a harborless furrow of ether!—
[Here apparently Peisthetairos gooses him.]
[No longer singing] Very gracefully, old fellow, you act the sophist
With these wise tricks!

1400

PEISTHETAIROS: So you aren't grateful to become "soaring on wings?"

KINESIAS: You have done thus to the Teacher-producer of the circle dances?!
To ME, over whom the tribes always fight?!¹⁶⁹

168. This and what follows echo *Clouds* 331–38.

169. The ten tribes of the Athenian citizenry competed in dithyrambic contests, and for the best producers.

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you wish, then, to stay with us and teach
For Leotriphides¹⁷⁰ a chorus of winged birds
Of the Crake-tribe?

KINESIAS: You are ridiculing me, it's obvious!
But then I for my part shall *not* stop, know well,
Until winged I run through the air!

[Exit Kinesias.]

1410 **IMPOVERISHED "SYCOPHANT"** [singing]: Who are these birds of
varied wing,
Possessing nothing?—
You long-winged one, of varied-hue, you swallow!¹⁷¹

PEISTHETAIROS: This is no paltry evil that has broken out!
This fellow has come hither, warbling in his turn!

SYCOPHANT: Again I address you, long-winged one, of varied-hue!

PEISTHETAIROS: (It seems to me that the song he sings refers to his cloak,
But it's likely he'll need more than a few swallows!)¹⁷²

SYCOPHANT: Who's the one here who puts wings on those who arrive?

PEISTHETAIROS: Here he is; but you need to say what it is you want.

1420 **SYCOPHANT:** Wings, wings are wanted!¹⁷³ Don't inquire twice!

PEISTHETAIROS: So do you intend to fly straight to Pellene?¹⁷⁴

SYCOPHANT: No, by Zeus! I am an island summons-server,
And sycophant, . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Bless you for your art!

SYCOPHANT: And pettifogger. So I need to take wings
In order to go around bothering cities with summonses.

170. Another very thin fellow, like the poet Kinesias.

171. Spoofingly adapted from the poet Alcaeus.

172. Meaning, his cloak is so threadbare that it evokes swallows to signal the return of Spring, referring to the ancient Greek proverb, "one swallow does not Spring make."

173. According to the scholia, a spoofing play on a famous line in the lost *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus: "weapons, weapons, are wanted!"

174. Where victors in chariot races received thick honorary cloaks.

PEISTHETAIROS: With wings you'll be wiser in some way at
summons-serving?

SYCOPHANT: No, by Zeus, but the pirates won't give me grief,
And I'll come back with the cranes,
Having swallowed many lawsuits for ballast.

PEISTHETAIROS: So is this really the work you perform? Tell me,
Do you, a young man, play the sycophant with foreigners? 1430

SYCOPHANT: For what am I to do? I don't know how to shovel!

PEISTHETAIROS: But there are other moderate jobs, by Zeus!
—From which a man of your size ought to make his livelihood,
In a way so much more just than contriving lawsuits!

SYCOPHANT: Give me wings, not advice, you divinely possessed fellow!

PEISTHETAIROS: I am now giving you wings, through speech.

SYCOPHANT: And how through speeches
Would you make a man winged?

PEISTHETAIROS: All are through speeches
Made aflutter.¹⁷⁵

SYCOPHANT: All?

PEISTHETAIROS: Have you not heard,
When fathers on occasion say 1440
About their lads, in the barbershops, the following things:
“It's terrible how Dieitrephe¹⁷⁶ with his talk has
My lad flying about chariot-driving.”
And another will say of his, that it's tragedy
About which he's flying—and that his thinking has “flown away.”

SYCOPHANT: So then they are winged through speeches?

PEISTHETAIROS: So I assert.
For by speeches the mind is raised aloft
And the human being is elevated. And thus I

175. An idiom, meaning “stirred up.”

176. See 798.

1450 Wish to set you flying, with worthy speeches,
That exhort to lawful work.

SYCOPHANT: But I don't wish it!

PEISTHETAIROS: But what will you do?

SYCOPHANT: I'll not disgrace my lineage!
To be a sycophant is for me an ancestral calling of my grandfather.
But give me swift and light wings—
Of a falcon, or a kestrel, so that, on foreigners
Having served summonses,
I can then get a judgment here,
And then fly back there again!

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand.
What you are saying is this—so that the foreigner may lose the
Lawsuit here, before he has even arrived!

SYCOPHANT: You have understood entirely.

1460 **PEISTHETAIROS:** And then while he is sailing here, you can fly there again,
To rob him of his property!

SYCOPHANT: You've got it entirely—
No different from a spinning top!

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand—
Tops, uh-huh. . . . And by Zeus, I have
Such very beautiful *Corcyraean*¹⁷⁷ wings for this!

SYCOPHANT: Egad! Alas! You've got a whip!

PEISTHETAIROS: This is a pair of wings,
With which I shall make you spin like a top this day!

SYCOPHANT: Alas! Alas!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not fly from here?
Will you not drop off into destruction, you most evil one?
You shall swiftly see bitter evil-working-twisting-of-justice!
[To slaves] Let's gather up the wings and depart!

177. Corcyra was famous for making double-thonged whips, and for troops armed with whips (Thucydides 4.47).

CHORUS: Many and strange and

1470

Wonderful are the things over which we have flown, and
Terrible are the affairs we have seen!

For there is a tree, by nature

Cleonymus¹⁷⁸—

Worthless, and otherwise

Cowardly and large.

It always in the springtime

Grows and plays the sycophant,

And in winter once again

1480

Throws off shields like leaves.

There is, again, a certain far-off land

Near darkness itself,

Bereft of lights,

Where humans with heroes

Dine, and

Mingle until evening;

Then no longer

Is the encounter safe.

For if one of the mortals encounters the hero

1490

Orestes¹⁷⁹ at night,

He would be stripped and paralyzed by him

On the right side.

PROMETHEUS: Alas! Alas! Oh that Zeus may not see me!

Where is Peisthetairos?

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, what's this?

Who's the fellow wrapped up?

PROMETHEUS: Do you see any of the gods

Behind me there?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, I do not!

But who are YOU?

1500

PROMETHEUS: How late is it in the day?

178. See note 36.

179. The hero of Aeschylus's trilogy, the *Oresteia*, but also the famous robber referred to at 712.

PEISTHETAIROS: How late? A little after noon.

But WHO ARE you?

PROMETHEUS: Is it Ox-loosing time, or later in the day?

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad! You're reducing me to idiocy!

PROMETHEUS: What's Zeus doing?

Dispersing the clouds, or gathering them?

PEISTHETAIROS: Go hang high!

PROMETHEUS: Here; I'll uncover myself!

PEISTHETAIROS: PROMETHEUS, my friend!!

PROMETHEUS: SHHH! Stop! Don't shout!

PEISTHETAIROS: What is it?

PROMETHEUS: Silence! Do not call my name!

For you will be my destruction, if Zeus sees me here!

But, so that I might inform you of all the affairs above,

Take this parasol of mine and hold it up

Over, so that the gods won't see me.

1510 **PEISTHETAIROS:** Hey! Wow!

That is good thinking, and very "Promethean"!¹⁸⁰

Get under it quick, and then be bold to tell me.

PROMETHEUS: Now listen—

PEISTHETAIROS: Talk, I'm listening!

PROMETHEUS: Zeus is destroyed!

PEISTHETAIROS: Since when is he destroyed?

PROMETHEUS: Since when you settled in the air.

For no one of the humans still sacrifices anything

To the gods, and no savor of thigh meat

Come up to us since that time,

But we fast as at the Thesmophoria,¹⁸¹

1520 Without burnt offerings. And the barbarian gods,

Who are starving and screeching like Illyrians,

180. The word means "thinking ahead."

181. An Athenian women's festival in honor of Demeter, which included one day of fasting.

Declare that they will start a military campaign from above
against Zeus,¹⁸²

If he doesn't get the markets reopened,
So that chopped innards can be introduced again!

PEISTHETAIROS: So there are some other, barbarian gods
Above you?!

PROMETHEUS: Aren't there barbarian ones,
Among whom is the ancestral deity of Execestides?¹⁸³

PEISTHETAIROS: And the name of these barbarian gods—
What is it?

PROMETHEUS: What is it?—"Triballians."¹⁸⁴

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand: isn't that where "rub yourself off!" has
come from? 1530

PROMETHEUS: Most of all! But one thing I tell you plainly:
Envoys will be coming here to negotiate—
From Zeus and from the Triballians up beyond.
You should not make peace, unless Zeus hands
The scepter over again to these birds,
And gives Basileia to you to have as wife.¹⁸⁵

PEISTHETAIROS: Who is Basileia?

PROMETHEUS: The most beautiful girl,
Who keeps the thunderbolt of Zeus
And everything else together—good counsel,
Good lawful rule, moderation, dock arsenals, 1540
Invective, the judicial paymaster, the three-obol payments.¹⁸⁶

PEISTHETAIROS: So she keeps everything for him?

182. The barbarian gods are being compared to the barbarians from the interior, who could attack the Greek cities on the coast of Illyria.

183. The citizen whose dubious ancestry makes him a special butt of this play; see 11 and 764.

184. The name of a fierce Thracian tribe allied with Athens; the name also connotes male sexual arousal and energetic or excessive sexual activity, to which savage barbarians were conceived as highly prone; Greek words with the root for "rub" (*tribō*) are charged with connotations of chafing the genitals to arousal.

185. "Basileia" means both "Queen" and "royal power."

186. The daily pay for a juror's service.

PROMETHEUS: So I declare.

And if you take her from him, you'll have everything!

That's why I came hither, to explain to you.

For I am always well disposed in mind to humans!

PEISTHETAIROS: For it is on account of you alone among gods that we cook over coals!

PROMETHEUS: And I hate all the gods, as you know!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, you were indeed always by nature a hater of gods!

PROMETHEUS: A pure Timon!¹⁸⁷ But, so that I can run away again,

1550 Hold the parasol, so that if Zeus should see me

From above, I will look like I am following the basket bearer.¹⁸⁸

PEISTHETAIROS: And take this stool here,¹⁸⁹ and be the stool-carrier!

CHORUS: And then near the Shadefoots¹⁹⁰ there is

A certain marshy lake, where the unwashed

Socrates leads souls;

And there Peisander came,¹⁹¹

Begging to see the soul which

Departed from him early while he was still alive,

Having a baby camel as sacrificial victim—

1560 Whose throat he cut,

Like Odysseus did,¹⁹² and went away,

While behind him there came up from below

To the blood of the camel

The vampire bat Chaerephon.

[Enter Poseidon, Heracles, and a barbarian god, Triballian.]

187. Timon was an Athenian proverbial for the hatred he bore his fellow Athenians.

188. In the Panathenaic processions, maidens from the best families had the honor of carrying the baskets, each followed by a maiden of a non-citizen resident family carrying a stool, and attended by a parasol bearer.

189. The word was euphemistically used for a trivet on which a chamber pot sat.

190. A mythic people inhabiting the Atlantic coast of Africa; they had feet so large that they used them for shade.

191. A democratic, and then later an oligarchic politician often lampooned for cowardice.

192. This is all a parodic reference to Odysseus's visit to the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.35ff.; dramatized in the lost *Soul Leaders* of Aeschylus), where he summoned and inquired of the souls of the dead by pouring blood in a trench for them to drink.

POSEIDON: The city of Cloudcuckooia

Is here visible, the destination of our embassy.

[To Triballian] You, whatever *are* you doing? You're wearing your cloak
on the left!?!?¹⁹³

Won't you change it to the right?!

You ill-starred one! What are you by nature—a Laispodias?¹⁹⁴

Oh Democracy! Where will you ever take us,

1570

If the gods are going to choose by vote such a one as this!

Will you hold still?! [Trying to adjust Triballian's cloak] Go hang! You are
really the most

Barbarian of all gods I have ever seen!

Look here, what are we going to do, Heracles?

HERACLES:

You have heard

From me, at any rate, that I wish to throttle the human,

Whoever it was, that once walled out the gods!

POSEIDON: But my good fellow, we have been elected envoys for *negotiations*!

HERACLES: So throttle him twice over, in my opinion!

PEISTHETAIROS: Somebody give me the grater! Bring the silphium spice!

Somebody bring the cheese! Stir up the coals!

1580

POSEIDON: We three gods bid greeting to the man!

PEISTHETAIROS: But I'm busy grating the silphium spice now.

HERACLES: What's this meat the flesh of?

PEISTHETAIROS:

Some birds,

Having risen up against the people's party of the birds,

Were judged to have committed injustice.

HERACLES:

So first you grate

Silphium over them?

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh, hello there, Heracles! What's afoot?

POSEIDON: We have come as envoys

From the gods to negotiate an end to the war.

193. A cardinal sin of upper class decorum: wrongly draping one's cloak.

194. A politician who apparently had an unsightly leg which he concealed by awkwardly draping his cloak.

PEISTHETAIROS: Hey, there's no olive oil in the flask!

1590 **HERACLES:** Yeah, and bird-meat ought to be well oiled!

POSEIDON: For we do not gain from warring;
And you, if you were to have friendly relations with us gods,
Would have rain water in your pools
And Halcyon days you would reap always!
We come invested with full authority in all these matters.

PEISTHETAIROS: But we never began
To make war before you did; and now we are willing—if so it is decided,
If only you are now willing to do something just—
To make a peace treaty. And the just things are the following:
1600 Zeus is to give back to us birds the scepter;
AND, if we come to an agreement
On these terms, . . . I'll invite the ambassadors to dine!

HERACLES: For me these things suit, and I vote for it.

POSEIDON: What, you ill-starred fool! You are a simpleton and just
a stomach!

You would deprive your own father of the tyranny?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Is that true? Won't you gods in fact have MORE
Strength, if the birds rule below?
Because now, hidden by the clouds,
The mortals skulk and falsify their oaths;
1610 But, if you have the birds as allies,
When someone swears by the crow and by Zeus,
The crow in stealth will come by that false swearer,
And, flying upon him, will by striking pluck out his eyes!

POSEIDON: By Poseidon, these things are beautifully said!

HERACLES: Seems so to me too.

PEISTHETAIROS: So what do YOU say?

TRIBALLIAN: Nabaisatreu.¹⁹⁵

HERACLES: You see? This one too praises it.

195. Gibberish, but the beginning (Na) sounds like Greek for "yes" (*nai*).

PEISTHETAIROS: And now in still another way
 You will hear how much good we will do you.
 If one of the humans to one of the gods
 Should in prayer vow a sacrificial victim, and then sophistically say,
 “The gods are patient”—not giving it back out of greed,
 We’ll undo also these things. 1620

POSEIDON: Come, show—in what way?

PEISTHETAIROS: When this human happens to be counting his money,
 Or to be sitting in his bath,
 A kite will stealthily fly down and seize
 The price of two sheep, which he will bring up to the god!

HERACLES: I again vote to give back the scepter to these!

POSEIDON: And the Triballian—let him now speak.

HERACLES: Triballian, is it your decision to cry out in pain? [Raising
 his club.]

TRIBALLIAN: Younoclubit!

HERACLES: He declares that I speak very well.

POSEIDON: Oh well, if you both agree to these things, then so do I. 1630

HERACLES: Listen you, it has been decided to do these things concerning
 the scepter!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, there is another thing I’ve just happened
 to remember!

I give up Hera to Zeus,
 But: that girl who’s Queen [Basileia] is to be given to me as my wife.

POSEIDON: Your erotic passion is not for reconciliation!
 Let’s go back home!

PEISTHETAIROS: A lot I care!
 Cook! You need to make the sauce sweet!

HERACLES: Poseidon, you-divinely possessed human! Where are you going!
 Are we going to fight a war over one woman?¹⁹⁶

196. The Trojan War was fought over one woman (Helen): the gods here lack respectful memory of the greatest Greek war.

1640 **POSEIDON:** Well what *are* we to do?

HERACLES: What?! Come to terms!

POSEIDON: You dumbell! Don't you know you've been cheated?
 You are hurting yourself! For if Zeus dies,
 And hands the tyranny down to these,
 You'll be impoverished! For all the wealth becomes yours—
 As much as Zeus leaves when he dies!

PEISTHETAIROS: Ai yi-yi, how he is sophistically lying to you!
 Come aside here, so that I can explain something to you.
 Your uncle's deceiving you, wretch!
 For not a bit of your patrimony is yours,
 1650 According to the laws: for you are a bastard, and not legitimate!

HERACLES: ME?! A *bastard*? What are you saying?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, you
 Are the child of a foreign woman!¹⁹⁷ Or how else
 Would Athena ever be the heiress, do you suppose,
 When she is a daughter, if there were *legitimate* brothers?!

HERACLES: Well, but what if my father gives me the money
 After he has died, as a legacy to a bastard?

PEISTHETAIROS: The law won't allow it.
 This Poseidon here, who now excites you on, will be the first
 To wrest from you the patrimonial funds,
 Claiming that he is a legitimate brother!
 1660 But I will read out to you the Solonic law:
 "To a bastard
 There is not to be
 Rights of close kinship,
 Where there are legitimate children.
 And if there should not be legitimate children,
 The money is to be shared by the nearest of kin."¹⁹⁸

HERACLES: I get no share of the patrimonial property?

197. The mother of Heracles was the mortal human Alcmene, wife of Amphytrion.

198. Not in meter; an actual quotation from the law (also quoted in Demosthenes 43.51).

PEISTHETAIROS: NO, by Zeus! —And tell me,
Has your father already introduced you to his *phratry*¹⁹⁹ brothers?

HERACLES: Not me, no. . . . And indeed, I've been wondering about that, for
quite a while. 1670

PEISTHETAIROS: Why indeed are you gaping up?—to look for a fight?
But if you are with us, I, having set you up as
Tyrant, will provide you with birds' milk!

HERACLES: In my opinion, you speak things of long-standing justice.
As regards the girl, and for my part, I let you have her!

PEISTHETAIROS: So what do YOU say?

POSEIDON: I vote the contrary!

PEISTHETAIROS: So the whole matter is up to the Triballian. What do you say?

TRIBALLIAN: Bootiful girl and great queen
Bird I give!

HERACLES: He says to hand her over!

POSEIDON: By Zeus, this fellow does NOT say to hand her over!
He twitters away like the swallows! 1680

PEISTHETAIROS: So he says give her to the swallows!

POSEIDON: You two negotiate and come to terms;
I, if you two agree, shall remain silent!

HERACLES: Everything you say is agreeable to us.
But come with us yourself into heaven,
So that you may take the queen [Basileia] and all things there.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well then, these were slaughtered just in time
For the wedding festivities!

HERACLES: You want me
To stay here and cook the meat meanwhile? You all go ahead! 1690

POSEIDON: YOU are going to cook the meat? You mean, to do a lot of
gobbling!
You're going with us, right?!

199. The religious guild, descended from a common ancestor, to which every legitimate Athenian male needed to be formally presented in order to gain citizenship.

HERACLES: But I would have done it so well!

PEISTHETAIROS: Someone bring me a wedding robe!

CHORUS: And there is in Phanae, near

The water-clock,²⁰⁰ a rascally
Race that fills-its-belly-with-its-tongue²⁰¹—
Who reap and sow,
And gather grapes (and figs²⁰²)
With their tongues.

1700 Barbarians are this race,
Gorgiases and Phillips.²⁰³
And from the belly-fillers-with-the-tongue,
These Phillips,
Everywhere in Attica,
The tongue is cut away!²⁰⁴

HERALD: Oh you doers of all good things, greater than can be spoken!

Oh thrice-blessed winged race of birds,
Welcome the tyrant to the prosperous halls!
For he approaches, shining as no all-blazing
1710 Star has ever been approaching its golden-rayed home!
The incandescence of the rays of the far-shining sun
Has not been so bright as his coming,
Possessed of a wife whose beauty is beyond utterance,
And wielding the thunderbolt, the winged shaft of Zeus!
An ineffable fragrance ascends to the depth of the sphere above,
Beautiful to behold; and breezes
Blow away the wreath of smoke from the incense!
And here he is, himself! Let the divine
Muse open Her sacred and auspicious mouth [to sing]:

200. A water clock was used to time the speeches in lawsuits; "Phanae" was a town in Chios, whose name sounds like a word that can mean "to denounce" or "to indict" (*phainein*).

201. A word invented to play on a common term of scorn for laborers—a race "that fills-its-belly-with-its-hands."

202. The word has the same root as the word "sycophant."

203. Gorgias is the famous teacher of rhetoric; Phillip was one of his Athenian students (*Wasps* 421).

204. The custom in sacrifices was to cut the tongue out of the victim.

CHORUS: Move back! Make way! Draw together! Stand aside!

1720

Fly around

The blessed one with his blessed fortune!

Oh, wow! Wow!

The bloom, the beauty!

Oh You who have entered into a marriage most blessed for this city!

CHORUS LEADER: Great, great fortune has overtaken

The race of birds

Through this man! But

Welcome with wedding songs and nuptial songs—

Him and his Queen!

1730

CHORUS: Once with Olympian Hera

Of the lofty thrones

The great ruler of the gods

Was conducted by the Fates

On that wedding day!

Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!

Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!²⁰⁵

And Eros, flourishing on all sides,

Golden-winged,

Steered straight with his bridle stretched back,

The best-man driver of the chariot at the marriage of Zeus

1740

And the happy Hera.

Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!

Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!

PEISTHETAIROS: I am charmed by the hymns, I am charmed by the songs;

And I delight in the words. Come now,

Celebrate also his earth-echoing thunder,

And fiery lightning of Zeus,

And terrible white-hot bolt!²⁰⁶

CHORUS: Oh great light of golden lightning!

Oh immortal fire-bearing spear of Zeus!

205. Two names of the god of marriage.

206. The line is Homeric: *Iliad* 8.133.